Reviewer's report

Title: Small Business Owners' Health and Safety Intentions: A Cross-Sectional Survey

Version: Date: 1 July 2005

Reviewer: Paul Schulte

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General

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

There is a need to discuss further the limitations of the study as described in our review.

I thought this was an interesting and useful paper, done with fairly good research design. I have a few minor comments about wording and a few major comments. My major comments concern whether they actually measured some of the concepts they intended to measure.

1. minor comment: Under Methods, survey design, I believe they mean they conducted "open-ended" telephone interviews, not non-structured interviews. They had specific questions that they asked each participant, so they did have a script and structure to follow. To many researchers, non-structured will mean a much more casual interview situation allowing considerable latitude in the discussion with each participant.

2. Their intentions toward safety measure (9 questions) looks good.

3. Attitude toward safety measure was only composed of 3 items and those were not well described. I think they used an importance of safety question, a safety is necessary question, and a "safety will be convenient to improve in the next 6 months" question. Since they were very interested in the correlation between their attitude measure and intentions/behaviors, I would have liked to see these questions verbatim to better judge how well they can comprise an attitude scale. Three items is not very many-- I think they might consider strengthening this in the future with additional items that all correlate well to indicate a strong positive attitude toward safety. I'm not sure these really do. I can imagine a situation where an owner may feel safety is important and necessary but not convenient to pursue in the next six months for other reasons totally unrelated to their feelings toward H&S. For example, they could have a health issue to deal with in the next six months or their daughter is getting married so they are preoccupied with other things unrelated to the company.

4. The subjective norm measure was only one question "most people important to me think I should improve S&H in my business in the next six months". Again I see this as problematic for a few reasons. "People important to me" is very vague and open to a lot of individual interpretation-- will the owner think of Mom and family, employees, ????. When I query on norms, I generally ask very specific questions naming the comparison group I want the person to bring to mind. For small business owners, I think more valid questions might be "other business owners I respect (or like me) think I should improve H&S in my business". Or if you want to know about significant others in the owner's life, ask"my spouse, kids, and/or family believe.". Unless you really know who the owner considers a significant person in his/her life, it's hard to interpret the variability in the responses to this question. The other problem with this measure is again, it adds the six months element. It is really asking two things.do others think I should improve H&S and do they think I should do this in the next 6 months. I think asking this way can lead to response quandaries for some participants that
muddy your data.

5. Control appears to be measured by one item: how easy is it for me to improve H&S in next 6 months. I don't think this gets at the concept of control at all. Control is a power measure often tied to self-efficacy and availability of choices. I would prefer items addressing things like "I have the decision making power", "I can choose to allocate the resources", "I can direct my staff to schedule the time for H&S", "I'm in charge of...."

6. The Outcome beliefs seem appropriate and fine.

7. The normative beliefs neglected to ask about the one group I think is most important: other small business owners like me. That's who small business owners are really likely to compare themselves to. The "standards of practice" are developed by peers-- not employees, workers comp, gov, customers, or venders. Not asking about the influence of their peers is a big fault in this measure in my opinion. I do agree that the others can be important influences on an owners behavior, particularly the workers comp company for economic reasons the affect the ability of small businesses to stay in business.

8. Control Beliefs were measured by 4 items that I really think reflect "barriers and facilitators" to action. For example, having resources, having adequate information, having supportive and cooperative employees, having adequate time. Again, I don't think they measured "control" per se, but did measure beliefs about some significant potential barriers that are important. Of course one could reasonably expect that those owners who believe they can deal with these barriers (money, knowledge, personnel relations, time) would be the same employers with a strong sense of intrinsic control over the situation. So as a proxy for control, may be just fine, but I'm not sure.

9. Under data analysis, I propose that their correlation between subjective norms and normative beliefs is weak because they are not measuring these concepts adequately as noted above, and "people important to me" may NOT be the employees, workers comp, gov, customers, and venders asked about under normative beliefs.

10. At the bottom of page 10 they mention that 300 surveys were used in the path analysis. I was wondering what happened to the other 48 or why they were discarded for this purpose. I am not strong in path analysis, and cannot comment much on this. They do seem to say the sample size is too small to really identify a path model (p.11).

11. Finally, because I don't think they operationalized all of their concepts correctly, I would suggest that their discussion may benefit from some reconsideration. Because they have problems with one of the three questions that make up their "safety attitude" measure and what they label their control measures and the norm measures (in my opinion) their conclusions may warrant some rephrasing or at a minimum, I would like to see a discussion of "Limitations of the study" in which they acknowledge that their measures may actually be tapping into concepts somewhat different than what they intended.

I still find this a very useful paper gathering good input from small business owners that should be a good addition to the literature. It will likely spur additional research efforts with this population, and can serve as a good comparison for future survey efforts.
Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I have conducted this review with the collaboration of my colleague Dr. Carol Merry Stephenson. Please include her name in the report. I declare that we have no competing interests.