Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 1 Date: 12 July 2005

Reviewer: Cora Roelofs

Reviewer’s report:

General
The authors turn their attention to a neglected area in occupational health: Small businesses. Although I would recommend this manuscript for publication, I definitely think that it needs a bit of work for it to make sense. Translating this behavioral theory to the work environment context is not easy and the manuscript would benefit from some discussion of the work environment context including the impact of regulations and employment relations, etc. Most importantly, more discussion is required to explain the usefulness of assessing what employers think vs. what they do. I think the article would be enhanced by providing more results from the qualitative portion of the project. I did not assess the stat methods, but did point out a potential problem with the scoring. Good luck!

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISION BELOW, I DID NOT SEGREGATE MY COMMENTS BETWEEN "MINOR" AND "DISCRETIONARY". I WOULD LIKE TO SEE ALL COMMENTS ADDRESSED, BUT THE ARTICLE MIGHT WELL BE ACCEPTABLE IF THEY WERE NOT ALL ADDRESSED WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE ONE BELOW WHICH IS ALSO REPEATED IN THE BODY OF COMMENTS BELOW.

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

1. Outcome Beliefs P. 8
Here is a big problem, I think, if you summed the scores, because some of these items are positives and some negative beliefs. I think you characterize the results in terms of higher beliefs, meaning higher scores (outcomes are more unlikely), but it included positives such as show that I care about employees as well as negatives such as lower business productivity, take too much time cut into profits, cause employees to complain, increase costs. I like that you mixed direction in the asking, but its a big problem for the analysis!

OTHER COMMENTS

Abstract:
2. in Background: ital intentions

3. in Methods: safety measures is Attitude

4. in Results: associated with higher attitudes I cant say that the concept of higher attitudes makes sense to me, esp. since one attitude is takes too much time.

5. in Conclusions: These results suggest that interventions should be aimed.... To what end? Improving compliance? Reducing accidents?

Background:
6. Par. 3 Data suggests that this health problem Is it really a health problem or are you saying
workplace injuries? And what is the data that shows that injuries result from the failure of small business owners to incorporate into their decision making their effects of their business practices? This sounds like an ecological fallacy. Please explain, because such injuries might also result from a rational calculation by the owner that the minor cost of sustaining (unlikely) OSHA fines is much less than the expense of installing an LEV system.

7. Also, the next sentence: Owners are the gatekeepers of S&H in small businesses. But in all businesses, by OSHA law, employers are responsible for providing a workplace free of recognized hazards and have the power to comply or not, prevent hazards or not, set rules for ppe use or not. So I'm not clear what gate-keeper means.

8. Second part of the sentence: but most hold the view should be changed to many may believe The article cited as support for this sentence is an excellent one, but a small qualitative study without any statistics to suggest that most do anything.

9. Par. 4 Authors cite the study by DFCI (Montange) efforts targeted at business owners rather than employees. The DFCI study did target owners as well as employees. Perhaps it should say: business owners in addition to employees. Or more focused attention on owners. Or targeting owners as the ones with the decision making power and responsibility for H&S.

10. Par 5 Small business owners rely on suppliers, other owners while government agencies and consultants are generally considered outside their comfort zone. First, I'm not sure what is meant by comfort zone. Second, our study (cite 9) found that small businesses make good use of outsiders including parent companies, insurers, ISO certifiers, etc.

11. Par 6 Please provide more to support the validity of the idea that Behavioral intentions are measured as a surrogate for actual behavior. I think that there are many who would argue and common sense would suggest that intentions are a very poor surrogate for behavior, esp when that behavior is mandated by law. Additionally, I would be looking for information suggesting that intention and behavior related in the work environment. Fundamentally, the question is: what difference does it make what an owner believes or intends or what their attitude is? Those with the worst attitude may provide the safest work environment. Those with the best intentions may have nothing to show for them. Not only is it necessary to convince that intentions, beliefs, attitudes impact behavior, but to convince that positive intentions result in positive behavior, etc.

Methods
Survey Design
12. Par 1 Following Ajzen and Fishbien, how? non-structured telephones interviews. Sounded like they were structured interviews since you list a series of questions you asked. Unstructured would be: so, tell me about H&S and your company.

13. I wish that you had presented an analysis of these interviews. How were they analyzed? How were answers recorded? How did you use the qual findings to make the survey? This qual stuff is really important empirical findings and I wish there was more of it in the paper!

14. Par 3 with a second mailing of the survey,

Study Population
15. Par 1 established after 1998 I think you must mean before. Explain why. Also, move definition of independent businesses to first mention in prior paragraph.

Survey Content
Intentions
16. It is important that you did not measure intentions toward safety in reference to a perceived
hazard. Those who perceive their businesses as being non-hazardous are less likely to intend to do anything.

17. Additionally, all of your items are measured positively for a subject area with high social desirability. You log transformed the responses to achieve normality it makes me wonder if everybody responded as they thought they ought to, with positive intentions?

18. Par. 3 You say that you came up with this list of good practice yet you did not ask if anyone intended to change equipment, inputs, or products to reduce hazards which is the good practice of industrial hygiene. Why was it left out?

Subjective Norm
19. The question you asked, most people important to me think I should improve H&S is rather odd, and I have to think transferred from health promotion/behavior science without giving thought to the work environment context. People important to anyone tend to be family and friends, not employees (though in small businesses they may overlap). So what if his wife thinks H&S isnt important? Perhaps more explanation of the logic?

Outcome Beliefs
20. Here is a big problem, I think, if you summed the scores, because some of these items are positives and some negative beliefs. I think you characterize the results in terms of higher beliefs, meaning higher scores (outcomes are more unlikely), but it included positives such as show that I care about employees as well as negatives such as lower business productivity, take too much time cut into profits, cause employees to complain, increase costs. I like that you mixed direction in the asking, but its a big problem for the analysis!

Results
21. I would like to see the distribution of the results untransformed. Where they skewed positively? In line with social desirability?

22. Again, the term higher attitudes is confusing to me on its face and because I dont know if its a product of higher scores or more positive, desirable, attitudes. (Belief that Takes to much time correlates with better attitude?)

Discussion
23. Par 4 These results suggest that interventions should be aimed at increasing owners expectations about the positive outcomes How? And does it matter whether they are reasonable expectations about actual outcomes or should we just tell owners to be positive? Promoting the economic benefits of compliance, investment in safety, has so far failed to convince employers to invest in safety. Safety pays a little, but non-compliance pays more in this era of limited enforcement and externalization of costs of injuries and certainly illnesses (See my article: Roelofs, C. (1997). Does Health Pay? Economic Incentives for the Protection of Construction Workers from Lead. New Solutions. 7(4):66-73) I would like to see some suggestions for actual interventions utilizing the results of this paper.

24. Demonstrating that business productivity and employee well-being will be enhanced by improvements in H&S may also lead to higher attitudes. Why care about attitudes if you have improvements in H&S? And even if productivity is slowed by, say, the installation of guardrails, as it necessarily would be, employers still have to do it, regardless of their attitude.

Limitations
25. Good response rate!

26. Discuss social desirability bias?
27. Par. 3 I would like to see some more support for the idea that intentions correlate with behavior, specific to this type of population or situation a regulatory construct, others welfare, etc.

Conclusion
28. Raising owners expectations. On what basis? Who says that H&S actually improves productivity?

Thanks for your contribution!

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.