

Promoting the efficient functioning of small enterprises and entrepreneurs

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Abstract

Promoting the efficient functioning of small enterprises and entrepreneurs has been challenging task. Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH) has done work for quite a long time among small enterprises and entrepreneurs in several larger studies. The results have been rousing, but the main problem is obviously the after-life of a project and unfortunately the driving force at enterprises has disappeared later on.

The current programme was established in 2006 when the new strategy of the FIOH was launched. Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has a high priority of small enterprises and urged the Institute to have effort to the issue. A programme was launched to promote effective functioning in small enterprises and among entrepreneurs. The programme has three parts: Producing a model of total management and producing a model of occupational health services for small enterprises and disseminating those through regional networks

Key words

Small enterprises, working environment, well-being at work, safety, occupational health services

Introduction

According to EU definitions microenterprises have less than 10 persons working, small less than 50 and medium size enterprises less than 250 persons working. In Finland 62% of the work force is from SMEs. The total number of enterprises is about 250 000 at the end of 2008. Of these 98% of the enterprises are SMEs and of those 99% are small and 1% medium size. About 40% of total

work force is working in small and 12% in medium size enterprises. (Entrepreneurship review 2008)

Finnish Institute of Occupational Health renewed its strategy in 2006 and new programmes were established to promote different aspects of working life and health in a broad perspective. One of the programmes was titled "Promoting the efficient functioning of small enterprises and entrepreneurs". The programme focuses on promoting well-being at work, productivity and continuous improvement of work and the working environment of small enterprises (SEs) and entrepreneurs.

Small enterprises and entrepreneurs do not utilise tools developed for work environment and safety management. The SEs and entrepreneurs do not know actual tools or those are considered too complicated. In addition, they are not covered by occupational health services (OHS). Kankaanpää et al (2005) showed that less than 10% of enterprises apply compensations from The Social Insurance Institution of Finland for their OHS expenses. This is actually not the same figure as the percentage of SEs joined in OHS, but the figure is about the same. In larger enterprises, more than 100 workers, the percentage varies between 92-95 in 2006 (Kauppinen et al 2006). The present models of action and methods of OHS are not efficient and do not meet the needs of SEs and entrepreneurs.

Approach and methods

This development programme is based on research done at FIOH during the last 10-15 years and has three larger tasks. These are total management (TM) of SEs, occupational health services model for SEs and dissemination of those products to actors and mediators through networks and education and training.

Risk assessment methods for SEs have been developed in several studies. Some are general methods some are branch of industry dependent. This programme focuses to develop a general and simple evaluation model for the management of a small enterprise. Models are analysed and evaluated by entrepreneurs themselves, experts from the Federation of Finnish Enterprises and will be tested at enterprises.

Occupational Health Service studies among small enterprises have been done during past 15 years. They have been focused on the under coverage of entrepreneurs to OHS and the implementation of present OH models to the needs of SEs. A three-level model of OHS for small enterprises and entrepreneurs ranging from one time consultative intervention by OHS professionals to a comprehensive, continuous OHS consisting of promotive and preventive services and medical care will be developed.

The third task is to establish a network to disseminate information for small enterprises and entrepreneurs. This network has a major area or local function, because SEs use local services, so they get information on well-being at work, safety and productivity connections at the same desk. These local actors are e.g. insurance institutions, Employment and Economic Development Centres, safety authorities, local offices of Federation of Finnish Enterprises.

Results

A toolkit "SE-TM" is prepared for the evaluation of work environment, safety, finance, management, and economics for SEs to evaluate and improve the function of enterprise and its productivity. These categories can be measured on a 4-level scale. The basic idea in this SE-TM model is factors affecting productivity. Therefore we are not measuring only work environment or health hazards, but also processes, management and leadership of a small enterprise. All these factors affect to productivity and also vice versa. One of the goals is to produce material which is understandable by entrepreneurs. We must use phrases which are simple, short, and used by entrepreneurs. The toolkit is evaluated by entrepreneurs and experts and representatives from Federation of Finnish Enterprises.

A comprehensive model for Occupational Health Care for SEs will be produced. A three-level model of OHS for small enterprises and entrepreneurs ranging from one time consultative intervention by OHS professionals to a comprehensive, continuous OHS consisting of promotive and preventive services and medical care. The model ensures entrepreneurs and SEs easy access to OHS. It enables them to choose the scope of services that best suit their situation. In OHS, there are specific methods and tools and operational models needed in promoting the occupational health and

safety of entrepreneurs and SEs. In addition there are other programmes which concentrate on the general processes of OHS which help our SE orientated OHS model to be implemented properly.

Third goal is the networking practices. Network is based on cooperation between actors among entrepreneurs of SEs and their partners (HR, management, insurance institution, Employment and Economic Development Centre, safety authority, Federation of Finnish Enterprises). The basic idea with networks is that they are widely participated regionally and the network is active, they are independent and activities are developed in collaboration with partners. Implementation through regional actors is important because entrepreneurs use local services through Employment and Economic Development Centres around country. Our task is to strengthen this connection to improve their services and maintain the well-being of the entrepreneurs, small enterprises and the workers in enterprises.

A nation wide forum "Well-being at Work" has been active for about two years. It is organised by the ministry of Social Affairs and Health and run mainly by FIOH. This forum will organise a road-show mainly during next year. The focus on the road show will be evaluation and development of different factors helping entrepreneurs and enterprises especially during economical recession. This forum is a network regionally and it will disseminate information and methods of our programme.

Conclusion

The effects at enterprises will be utilisation of tools and methods for work environment and management, usage of a network of actors by entrepreneurs and utilisation of the SE-OHS model in OH units.

SEs and entrepreneurs are widely involved in a network of regional development and the network is active, they are independent and activities are developed in collaboration with partners.

The future impact of the above inputs will be that occupational accidents and ill-health decreases in SEs, the coverage of OHS will increase by 10 %, and finally health and well-being in SEs and among entrepreneurs will improve.

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