

Healthier Entrepreneur - Healthier Enterprise

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Abstract

Entrepreneurs' thoughts are in business and the fact that health is an important part of successful entrepreneurship is forgotten. The aim of "SYTY2000[®] -programme was to activate entrepreneurs to maintain and improve their health and well-being along their daily working life. Methods used were open access events about health for the entrepreneurs, development of self-assessment forms of working conditions and health, training of OHS and support to the local associations of entrepreneurs to improve their members' well-being during the programme. Entrepreneurs have started to pay more attention to their health. Local associations of enterprises are organizing health promoting events. Meetings between local associations of enterprises, OHS and other local health service providers succeeded in introducing these parties to each other. A new model of arranging OHS to entrepreneurs was developed and OHS are slowly learning to use it. In general the culture of entrepreneurs is today more health-supportive than earlier.

Key words

self-employed, entrepreneurs, health promotion, occupational health services, network

Introduction

In Finland the significance of small (1-49 employees) and medium-sized enterprises (50-249 employees) to national economy has increased during last 10-15 years. Also their ability to employ personnel has become more essential and the major growth in personnel has actually happened within the micro enterprises. At the moment, 93 % of all enterprises in Finland belong to this category. In persons this means over 340 000 entrepreneurs and employees altogether (Statistics Finland 2009).

These micro enterprises have one special commonality; they all are entrepreneur-centred. In other words entrepreneur's skills, knowledge and ability to take risks are vital to the successful business (Littunen 1994). This fact has been recognised for a long time, but entrepreneurs' health and well-being have however not been seen as a vital part of entrepreneurship. Not even though there is a correlation between entrepreneur's health turning worse and business going worse (Luoma 1997; Pakkala etc. 2002).

Challenges to micro entrepreneurs' health promotion can be seen by understanding the nature of entrepreneurship. The Oxford English Dictionary (2009) defines an entrepreneur as

”one who undertakes an enterprise; one who owns and manages a business; a person who takes the risk of profit or loss”.

What kind of a person is an entrepreneur who can meet this challenge? S/he is often work-oriented, self-confident, creative, independent, determined and is able to take risks (Laitinen 1986, Peltonen 1986, Jonninen 1995). S/he is working an average of 50 hours per week and is off duty an average

of 12 days per year (Pakkala & Saarni 2000; Hietala 2009). The positive sides of entrepreneurship are described to be freedom, work's demands and control over one's work. On the other hand there lies a risk behind all this; the work can take over the other sides of life including taking care of one's health and well-being. (Kaarlela etc. 2001.)

The attitudes, beliefs and way of action of a micro entrepreneur are often tied to the current entrepreneurial culture. This culture often emphasizes the work and no or minor attention is paid to health. Even though Borg and Borg (1998) have discovered that the biggest single risk for the enterprises is, according to the entrepreneurs in small and medium-size enterprises, an entrepreneur's sickness or disability to work. On the other hand, entrepreneur has to believe in herself, look wealthy and be optimistic about health. Pakkala and Saarni (2000) found out that entrepreneurs' estimation about their health was more optimistic than medical doctors' objective appraisal. It also seems that micro entrepreneurs do not necessarily recognize the health risks of their work and working environment. (Kaarlela etc. 2001; Naumanen etc. 2006).

Occupational health services are one of the natural partners when talking about health promotion in the working life. In Finland, the employers need to arrange the occupational health services (further OHS) to their employees since 1978, based on the Occupational Health Care Act. For the entrepreneurs themselves this is voluntary. At the moment the employers have arranged OHS to about 90 % of employees. Only 15-30 % of entrepreneurs have arranged OHS for themselves (Manninen etc. 2006). The reasons for the low coverage of OHS among entrepreneurs have been explained mainly by following: entrepreneurs are not aware of their possibility to arrange services for themselves and they do not know the services provided by OHS. On the other hand the OHS do not know well enough the aspects of micro entrepreneurs and enterprises and so they have

difficulties to offer proper services for entrepreneurs. In addition the resources and costs of OHS have been claimed to be one possible obstacle to execute OHS to micro entrepreneurs and enterprises. (Pakkala etc. 2005.)

Nationwide entrepreneur organizations have been active in Finland for more than 100 years, beginning in 1898. The Federation of Finnish Enterprises is constructed of the comprehensive network of 21 regional organizations, under them 412 local associations and 51 trade organizations. (Federation of Finnish Enterprises 2009.) The Regional Organization of Enterprises in South-West Region is one of the regional ones and it has 36 local associations.

Associations of entrepreneurs and enterprises are lobbying for their members. Traditionally these organizations have concentrated on taxation, labor policies, legal issues dealing with enterprises and entrepreneurship training. They have a firm network of entrepreneurs and they do speak the same language with them. These associations could be the ones to support entrepreneurs' to take care of their health and well-being as a part of successful entrepreneurship.

Along with OHS and local associations of entrepreneurs, there are other enterprises and associations, which can promote entrepreneurs' health. These are for example organizations and associations in public sector (public health organizations, sports organizations), private health and sports services enterprises (e.g. physiotherapist, pharmacies, gyms), municipal activities in health, sports and culture. There are also companies which give assistance in developing working environment. There is a true possibility to build up a health network which can reach and support the entrepreneurs and also give a hand to each other in daily work.

Approach and methods

Since 1995, the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (Turku Regional Office) and the Federation of Finnish Enterprises/The Regional Organization of Enterprises in South-West Region have co-operated to implement SYTY2000[®] -programme (Picture 1). The programme is focusing on the health and well-being of entrepreneurs. The implementation of this programme is done within three different target groups, with the entrepreneurs, with the occupational health services and with the local member associations of the Regional Organization of Enterprises in South-West Region.

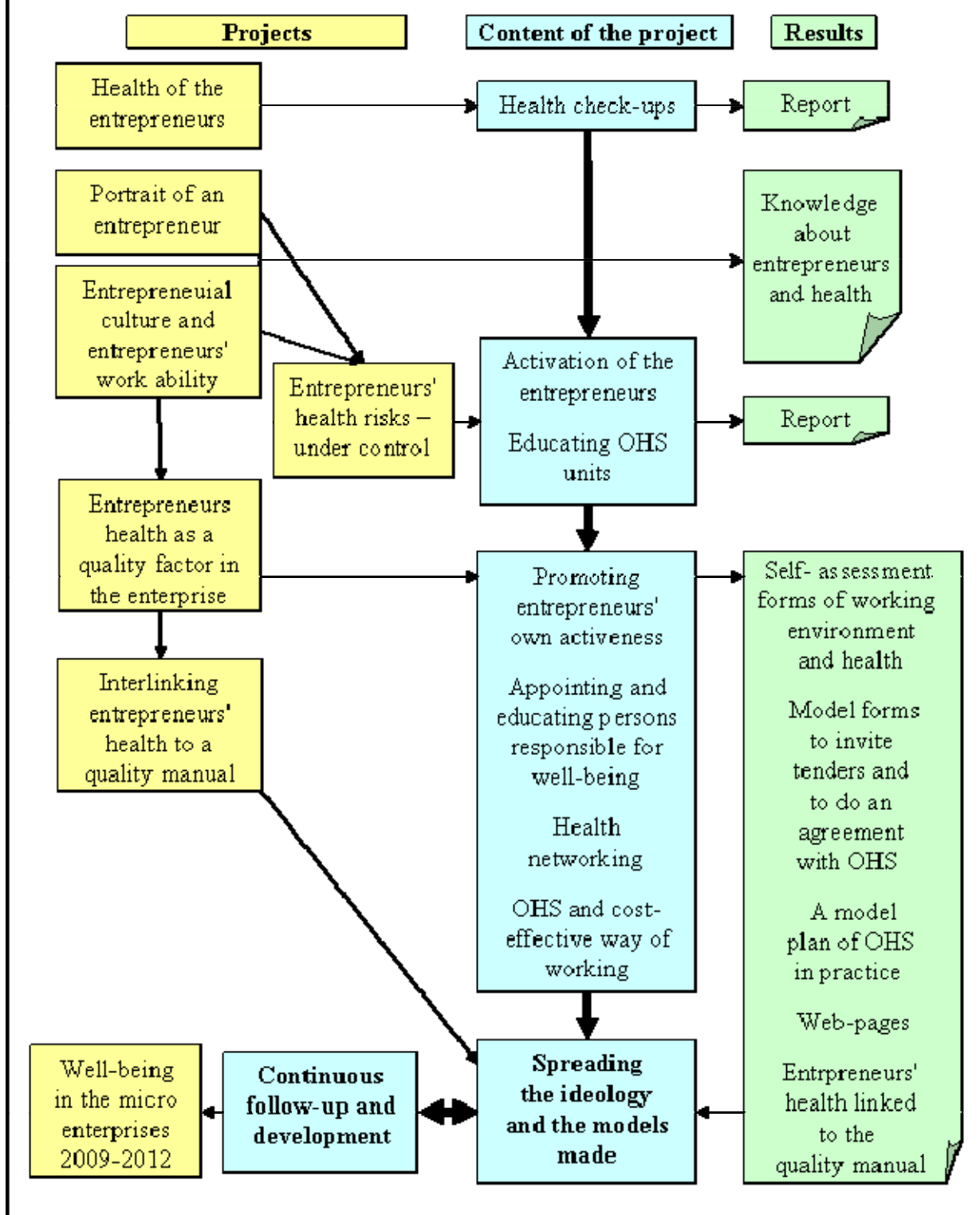
The entrepreneurs

The aim was to get entrepreneurs take into the consideration the aspects of health in their daily work and life and to activate entrepreneurs to take care of their own health and well-being.

To educate entrepreneurs about the aspects of health, the project organized open access events to the entrepreneurs around south-west Finland. Topics of those evenings considered entrepreneurship's effects on entrepreneurs health, tips and tools to promote own health and well-being, occupational health services for entrepreneurs and introduction of local firms and associations which can help entrepreneur to take care of oneself (for example sports and health associations, gyms).

Occupational health services are natural partners, what comes to the promotion of work-related health and working environment. Because only about 15-30 % of entrepreneurs had arranged occupational health services, the programme decided to develop and publish a booklet called "Occupational health services for entrepreneurs". It contains common knowledge about occupational health services and how to arrange occupational health services. The main thing of the

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Picture 1. SYTY2000® -programme.

booklet however was self-assessment forms about health and working environment. These forms were thought to work like mini-intervention; to get the entrepreneurs to sit down and to think about their own health and working environment. The self-assessment forms are also available in the internet both Finnish and Swedish (www.syty2000.fi). To ease the entrepreneur's step to contact local OHS, the model forms to invite tenders, to do an agreement with OHS and an example plan of OHS in practice were also included to the booklet.

Occupational health services

The OHS didn't have enough knowledge about the nature of entrepreneurs' work and health. So to help personnel in OHS to understand entrepreneurs and also to find new ways to work with small scale enterprises, a new, cost-effective model how to arrange OHS to small and medium size enterprises was developed. This model and other information about the work and health of the entrepreneurs were introduced to personnel of OHS in refresher courses. Also the forms, published in booklet mentioned earlier, were delivered to OHS to help them work with the micro enterprises.

The local associations of entrepreneurs

The aim of the project was to get the members' health as a goal of local associations of entrepreneurs. During the project persons responsible for well-being were appointed to the local entrepreneur associations and almost every local associations chose the person from it's board. The work of these persons was to act as co-ordinators and spokespersons at the local level. Within the framework of the project, they were trained and orientated to become spokespersons for health and well-being experts in terms of the health services directed at entrepreneurs. After this training the project kept supporting them by sending written material (e.g. nutrition, sports, OHS, weight management, first aid instructions, quitting smoking) once a month.

Local partnership meetings were arranged to activate local health networking. The programme invited persons to the meetings from the local entrepreneur's association including the person responsible for well-being, from the local OHS, from other health care providers (private and municipal) and local trade promoters.

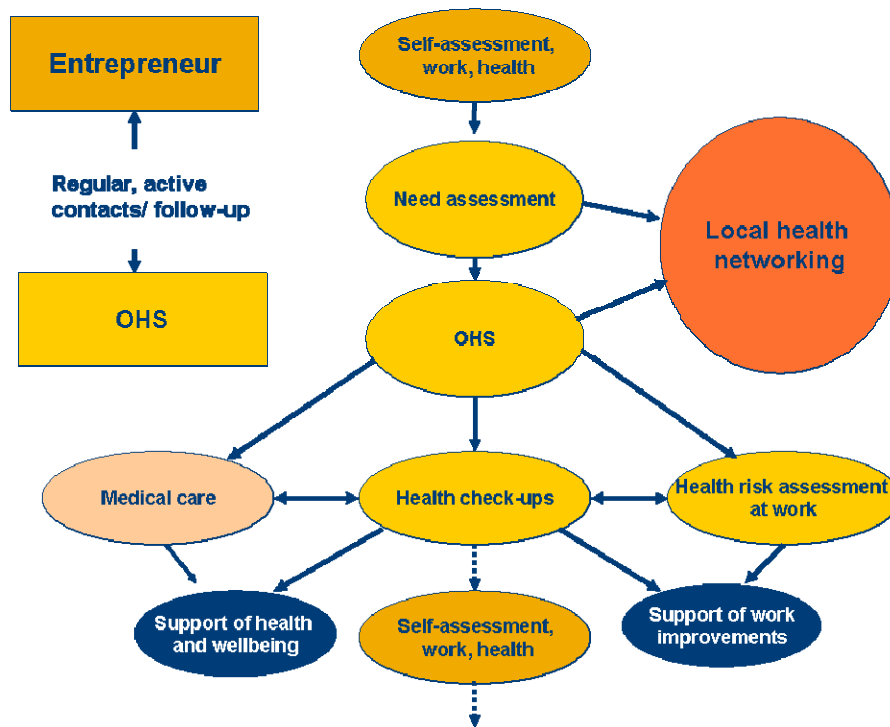
Results

The booklet of "Occupational health services for entrepreneurs" were delivered to entrepreneurs via the local associations of entrepreneurs, altogether 56 000 pieces nationwide. It has helped entrepreneurs to understand the functions of OHS and also motivated them to take care of their own health. Couple of thousands of visitors have been filling the electronic self-assessment forms in the internet-pages of the programme (www.syty2000.fi).

The work is still, naturally, the first in entrepreneurs' thoughts. But entrepreneurial culture is changing little by little. Entrepreneurs are more interested in attending to the fitness improvement courses than before. They want to use more OHS to improve their health. Entrepreneurs even say aloud, that they would like to keep more days off from the work than they can at the moment (Hietala 2009).

The new, developed model of OHS is based on the self-assessment forms of health and working environment. The self-assessment forms are delivered to entrepreneur by her/his OHS. The entrepreneur fills them and then s/he mails the forms back to the OHS. Then the OHS estimate the situation based on filled forms. If there are problems in health or working environment or both, the

OHS contact the entrepreneur and agree with s/he for the further activities (health check ups, medical care, health risk assessment at work, utilizing local network). Otherwise the new contact is taken after a year by the OHS. (Picture 2.)

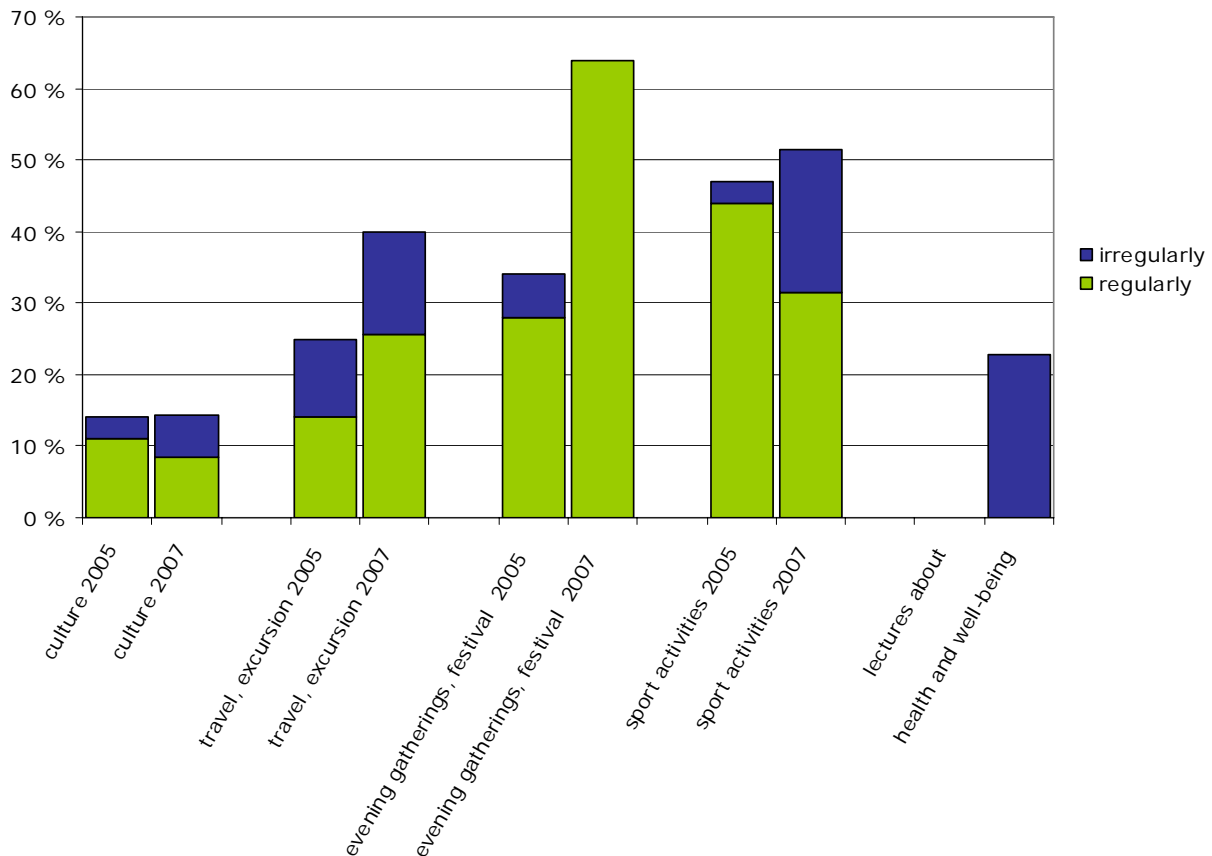


Picture 2. The new model of OHS to entrepreneurs.

The persons responsible for well-being have succeeded in their work. There has been an increase in the activities of the local associations of entrepreneurs from year 2005 to 2007 (Picture 3). Work of these persons is based on voluntariness; they get their bread-and-butter from their enterprises.

The meeting between local association of entrepreneurs, local OHS, other local health care providers (private and municipal) and local trade promoters were seen important. In general there

was no continuation after the first organized meeting. Mainly the reason was, that were no active person(s), who have time and enthusiasm to arrange the meetings in the future.



Picture 2. The activities arranged to improve health and well-being of entrepreneurs' by the local associations of entrepreneur (% of local associations).

Conclusion

Being a micro entrepreneur is a way of living. During the long days of working, it is easy to leave taking care of oneself behind. To take care of her/himself, the entrepreneurs do need to get information about how to take care of their own health and work ability. The SYTY2000[®] - programme has based, from the very beginning, to needs and thoughts of entrepreneurs. Both

planning and implementation of the programme has been made in co-operation with regional and local associations of entrepreneurs.

The persons responsible for well-being in the local associations of entrepreneurs have reminded entrepreneurs, that health and well-being belong to entrepreneurship. They have organized associations health promotion action together with the members of the association's board. Even though this system works mainly very well, the persons responsible for well-being need education and tips how to take care of this voluntary post.

Health networking is still quite a new idea in the field of occupational health and safety. Being a part of a health network both eases the work done by the OHS and gives more parties to entrepreneurs and to the associations of entrepreneurs to turn with when support or help is needed. The new model of OHS to micro enterprises is based to the idea that with the assistance of self-assessment forms it is possible to recognize the entrepreneurs and enterprises, which are in need of support. OHS can then focus their resources to the ones' needing for treatment or support. In this way, the practice work in OHS is cost-effective both customer and OHS themselves.

The health of an entrepreneur has not been a part of the traditional entrepreneurial culture. Changes in the culture are usually occurring slowly. In SYTY2000[®] -programme we have had chance to see positive progress happening among the entrepreneurs and OHS. However, there is still a lot to do, the trip has just begun.

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