



Understanding small business motivations and needs: Participation in the Health and Safety Excellence Program

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Research team and funding

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- Infrastructure Health & Safety Association
- Workplace Safety North

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INTRODUCTION

WSIB HEALTH AND SAFETY EXCELLENCE PROGRAM (HSEp)

SMALL BUSINESS STUDY



wsib
ONTARIO

Health and Safety
Excellence program

 Institute
for Work &
Health

Health and Safety Excellence Program SMALL BUSINESS STUDY



Small businesses choose 3-5 topics:

- Leadership and commitment
- Health and safety responsibilities
- Health and safety communication
- Injury, illness and incident reporting
- Incident investigation and analysis
- Recognition of hazards
- Risk assessment
- Control of hazards



Source: WSIB HSEp open house presentation

Research Objectives

- Understand the needs, motivations, and experiences of small businesses participating in the HSEp Small Business Study.
- Inform effective approaches to the delivery of OHS services to small businesses and ways to help small businesses improve health and safety.

METHODS

Study Design



Interviews with
small businesses

SB owner/senior leadership,
OHS lead,
administrative/operations



Interviews with
service providers

OHS consultants, program
administrators

Study Design



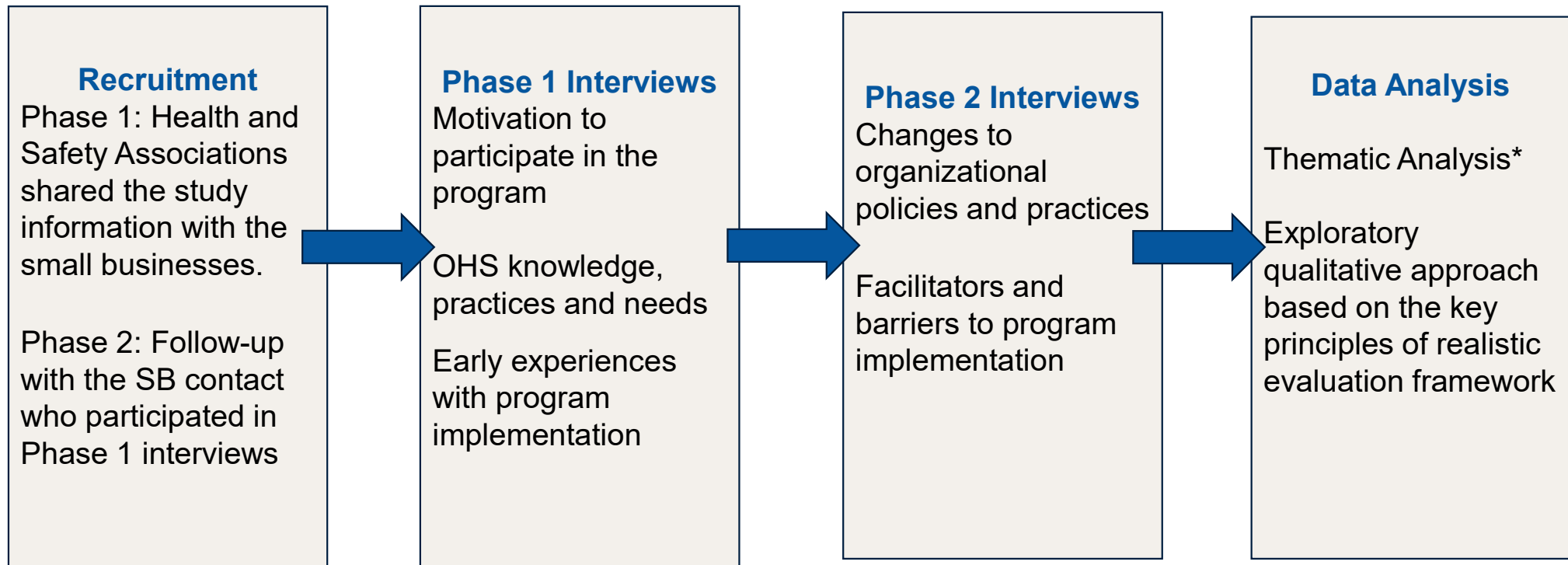
Interviews with
small businesses



Interviews with
service providers

Phase 1 (Apr – Oct 2022)
Early enrolment (0-4 months)
Phase 2 (Apr – Oct 2023)
Follow-up (12-18 months)

SB Data Collection and Data Analysis



Study Design



Interviews with
small businesses

Phase 1 n=34 (32 SBs)

Phase 2 n =15



Interviews with
service providers

Phase 1 n=12

Phase 2 n =10

Small Business Profile

- Industries: construction, electrical, transportation, health and social services, retail, education, manufacturing, mining
- SB size: 4 - 50 FTE; years in business: 2 - > 50 years; 1/3 identified as a family business
- At Phase 1, 14 SBs were either in the very early stages of their topic implementation or had not started the topics at the time of the interviews. Eighteen businesses started the topic implementation and had progressed somewhat further in the program.
- At Phase 2, 12 businesses had completed one or more topics, with five business moving into Year 2. Three had dropped out of the program.

FINDINGS

What motivated small businesses participate in and continue the program?

Program participation

- ***SBs participated in the program*** to improve OHS policy and practices, access resources about OHS, increase compliance, decrease claims and their cost, improve business reputation and competitiveness, and access financial incentives.

Motivation to
participate in
the program

“...We have all of the documents in place, but there’s been no implementation or enforcement...There’s been no health and safety committee. There’s been no meetings or nothing. I just think that this is something that has to get done [...] I got an invitation to participate in this study..., and I decided that ‘Yes, this is something that we have to do.’” (SB 25, Phase 1)

Program participation

- ***SBs who continued the program were motivated by*** financial incentives, seeing tangible program impacts on OHS; opportunity to evaluate, receive feedback and improve OHS; and long-term business benefits.

Motivation to
continue in
the program

“Right now, we are small..[...]..this is the time to implement this sort of thing... Then as the business grows, it's easier [...] people want to work for companies that are organized and that make everything very upfront and clear. I think for future employee retention, that's the key.” (SB 6, Phase 2)

Program participation

- ***SBs discontinued the program*** due to challenges such as lack of time, juggling multiple high priorities, not fully understanding the program requirements, and program not adding much to their business.
- SB representatives seemed to remain committed to further developing or improving OHS programs within their business, and considered the information and resources shared in the program helpful in doing so.

Reasons to
discountiue
the program

“Where I can see [the] program being very beneficial to somebody that really doesn't have the same background as me that walks them through the whole process [...] I found it for my case to be just a little bit too much for what I needed to accomplish because of my background already...It's nice to go through all the steps and get monitored feedback from [the program] on it.” (SB 1, Phase 2)

FINDINGS

What are the small businesses experiences with implementing program topics and making OHS improvements?


Experiences with program implementation and OHS improvements

Phase 1 interviews – Early experiences

- SBs developed foundational OHS knowledge, recognized the gaps in OHS practices, and formalized OHS policies and practices

Phase 2 Interviews – Continuing program implementation and OHS improvements

- Improved OHS policies and practices (establishing formal hazard and incident reporting processes, JHSC/HS representatives, formal OHS training, providing OHS resources for employees)
- Increased safety awareness and engagement
- Improved OHS communication



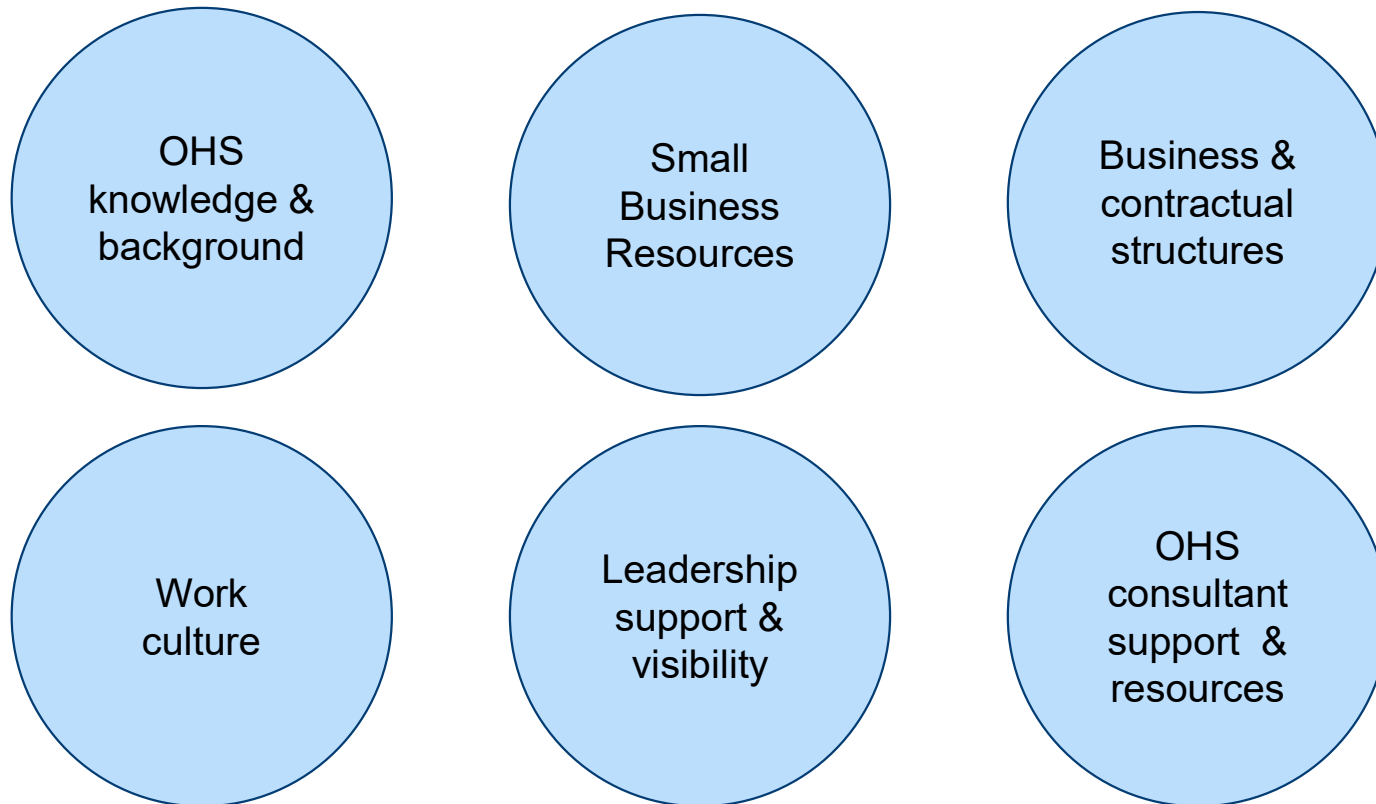
OHS
improvements

“One of the big things we implemented on-site was having a health and safety box that has a binder. All [documents] stays in that box on site.....[Now], the [workers] feel safe around site... [...] it's helpful for everyone to feel as a business, we are working towards a safer workplace. [...] I feel just change the morale a little bit.” (SB 3, Phase 2)

FINDINGS

What factors play a role in small businesses ability to make OHS improvements?

Factors impacting small businesses' ability to make OHS improvements



OHS knowledge/role of the SB representatives

- Limited OHS knowledge resulted in a steep learning curve.
- Some SB representatives shared that being responsible for program implementation helped them improve their personal knowledge of OHS and their leadership abilities.

OHS
knowledge &
background

“...everything was way over my head because I knew nothing” (SB 25, Phase 1)

“...The fact is you are the boss, but the reality is if you don't tell us, there's a good chance we don't know many of the regulations. It's not that we don't want to comply, it's that we don't know...” (SB 27, Phase 1)

Limited small business resources

- Limited time and human resources. Need to balance time, staff, and financial resources to make OHS improvements.




Small
Business
Resources

“It sounds like the most obvious thing in the world, but the biggest challenge is time. Right now, another big challenge is staff [...] if there was training that was required...in the past, I may have delegated that... Right now, there's just not enough staff, even to do the standard daily task required.”
(SB 16, Phase 2)

Business and contractual structures

- Variability in staffing, seasonal work, remote and lone work impacted OHS communication and training.
- Contractual relationships meant different OHS standards in client's sites.




Business &
contractual
structures

“...health and safety-wise, I have very little control because they're going into the customer's area. The customer, they have the say of the working conditions, how they're set up...Because we are for-hire people, it sounds to me like our guys always wind up, if there's a really icky job, our guys do it...” (SB 6, Phase 1)

Work culture

- Production focused work culture, attitudes related to new information, formal procedures.




Work
culture

“ Everyone's so busy all the time so there's a lot of apathy towards the requirements of health and safety. Every quarter, when I set up the [JHSC] meeting there's a lot of huffs and puffs about, 'I don't have time to be going to these meetings.' [...] they're not much for corporate procedures, I guess.” (SB 18, Phase 1)

Leadership support and visibility

- There was variance in leadership support and engagement.
- Leaders providing the participant with the resources, time, and the authority to make changes facilitated OHS improvements.
- Support of OHS personnel (JHSC, HS representatives, supervisors)
- At Phase 2, some SB representatives shared that the business leadership have become more visible and involved in program implementation.




Leadership
support &
visibility

“We have managers and supervisors, but [the owner] the head honcho [...] I had him review the procedures to make sure they were up to snuff and he read through them and would give me notes if need be...He was fairly involved, I would say. ” (SB 18, Phase 2)

Instrumental and motivational support provided by OHS consultants

- Resources and templates (policy templates, quick tip guides, accessible instructional videos) provided by the HSAs
- One-on-one OHS consultant support (direct line of communication, OHS consultant checking in, helping understand gaps, providing motivation)



OHS
consultant
support

“If I didn't have a person like [OHS consultant], I would not get through the program and I would not have finished the policies. I can guarantee you that...Too much of life and too much work gets in the way...To make sure that you just stay focused on just your area when project creep can happen so easily and I don't know how many times [OHS consultant] was like, ‘Okay, this is what we're working on. Let's bring it back to that...’” (SB 10, Phase 2)

DISCUSSION

Discussion

- Many SBs have minimal OHS knowledge – introductory orientation to health and safety and establishing OHS foundations
- SBs make OHS improvements in the context of limited resources, and a complex and dynamic environment – practical, simple, accessible, relevant resources
- SBs may not be familiar with how to start the process of change, planning for change – clear expectations around roles, process, and time commitment required to make OHS improvements
- Supporting OHS leadership (JHSC/HS reps) – building knowledge and confidence

Discussion

- Direct, one-on-one support can help SBs to feel more resourced and prepared to make OHS improvements
- SBs desire to establish a stronger safety culture within their businesses, but experience challenges – early focus on safety culture

Strengths and limitations

Study limitations and strengths

- Challenges in recruiting SBs for interviews resulted in small number of participants. Could not capture the experiences of the SBs who did not participate in the follow-up interviews.
- Our sample included full range of experiences and progress in the program, including small businesses that discontinued their participation in the program.
- The strengths include the amount of detail about the similarities and differences in the journeys of small businesses.
- The breadth and depth of SB experiences was facilitated by adopting a qualitative methodological approach.

Thank you

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