

**'Developing Responsible Business Practices in SMEs: Lessons learned from the UK'**

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Recent occupational safety and health (OSH) promotion strategies by the European Commission and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work have attempted to link OSH with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), establishing a business case of strategic importance for organisations (EC, 2001; 2002). However, it has also been recognized that more research is necessary to explore the integration of the two concepts and engage companies (SMEs in particular) in CSR activities. At the same time, there are now some available examples in enterprises of different sizes where linking OSH with CSR has resulted in positive OSH and CSR practices (EASHW, 2004). This presentation will discuss the work of the Institute of Work, Health & Organisations in this area and lessons learned so far. Findings from 120 semi-structured interviews with owners/managers of SMEs from a variety of sizes and sectors showed that awareness and understanding in relation to CSR and OSH differed on the basis of the sector and the size of the company. A need for more awareness raising in relation to both CSR (and the discourse surrounding it) and OSH and how the two areas can be interrelated was identified. Most of the companies that participated in this research had in place responsible practices that map on CSR internal and external dimensions, however these were perceived as good business practices and were not encapsulated within the CSR framework. In relation to OSH, there appeared to be an overwhelming focus on safety issues, highlighting the need for educating SMEs on work-related health issues and a more comprehensive approach to employee well-being. On the basis of these findings, a framework for integrating OSH and CSR in the SME context was developed. This framework served as the basis for the development of a training workshop for SMEs and will be used for further research, testing its application in SMEs and examining its effect on OSH and CSR practices, with the aim to encourage companies to move beyond a mere focus on legal duties and enforcement towards linking OSH with good and responsible business practices within a CSR framework.

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