sport and social issues

Attitudes and awareness of health promotion amongst Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Scotland

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Aim of paper and research questions
The aim of this paper is to assess the views of business leaders in Scotland towards health promotion in the workplace. Research questions:

1. Where do Scottish employers currently find information on health and wellbeing in the workplace?
2. How aware are Scottish employers of the Scottish Government's Healthy Working Lives agenda?
3. How aware are Scottish employers of health promotion issues in the workplace?
4. What importance do Scottish employers place on health promotion including promotion of physical activity?

Literature review
The World Health Organisation's Ottawa Charter 1986 has been described as "perhaps the most important occasion for the development of health promotion" (Hanson, 2007: 72). The recognition that one's physical environment has a real impact on health outcomes has lead to numerable changes in the way public health services are delivered.

In Scotland attempts to enhance health and wellbeing in the workplace have been led, since 2005, by the Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives (the Centre). The Centre runs a variety of activities to support businesses, specifically targeted at Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SME's), as well as an accredited award scheme.

Yet it remains unclear to what extent business manager's value moves by the Scottish Government and NHS Health Scotland to support and promote health and wellbeing in the workplace. This research directly addresses this knowledge gap.

Research design and data analysis
A random sample, of 666 SME's across Scotland, was targeted to participate in a survey of opinions and values towards health and wellbeing in the workplace. 105 completed surveys were returned (15.7% response rate) of which most respondents were senior managers of small companies across Scotland.

Results
The survey findings suggested that there is a lack of awareness around where to find information on health and wellbeing in the workplace. 29% of respondents could not think of any sources of information or referred to Google. The most common source of information was the Health and Safety Executive website (32%) and no respondents referred to Healthy Working Lives. When

asked, 94% of SME's surveyed had never heard of the Healthy Working Lives award scheme. Yet awareness of certain issues within this agenda was substantial. For example 91% stated awareness of Workplace Safety and, along with monitoring of sickness absence, the compliance to legislative requirements was seen as important by respondents (63% and 97% respectively). Yet issues such as mental health and healthy lifestyles were seen as much less important (40% and 23% respectively).

Overall the findings suggest that SME's are primarily concerned with reactive approaches to health and wellbeing, particularly in relation to legislative compliance. Issues surrounding health promotion would appear to be of much less concern.

Discussion and conclusion

The survey findings would suggest that legal compliance remains the primary concern of managers in SME's. Yet this emphasis may overlook the value of proactive approaches to health promotion that have become increasingly recognised by national and international public bodies, such as the WHO.

This may be due to a persistent view that work and lifestyle issues are, or should be, separate. Such thinking is often conceptualised in discussions around work-life balance or in theoretical discussions around work and leisure (see Beatty & Torbert, 2003; Bond, 2004; Booth & Van Ours, 2009; Burchielli et al., 2008; Khattab & Fenton, 2009; Wise & Bond, 2003). Thus, these traditionally perceived boundaries between work and lifestyles might work against moves by public health organisations to consider health as a holistic concept that transcends such boundaries.

This represents a key challenge for public bodies working in the health agenda including sport-related bodies who consider promotion of physical activity in the workplace as part of their remit. Specifically, the question remains how best to raise awareness of, and provide support for, health promotion in the workplace? This would appear from the survey findings to be an onerous task, particularly given that 94% of SME's surveyed stated that they had never heard of the Healthy Working Lives award scheme.

This suggests that, without responding to business perceptions, a purely supply-led approach may fail to address barriers to workplace health promotion.

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