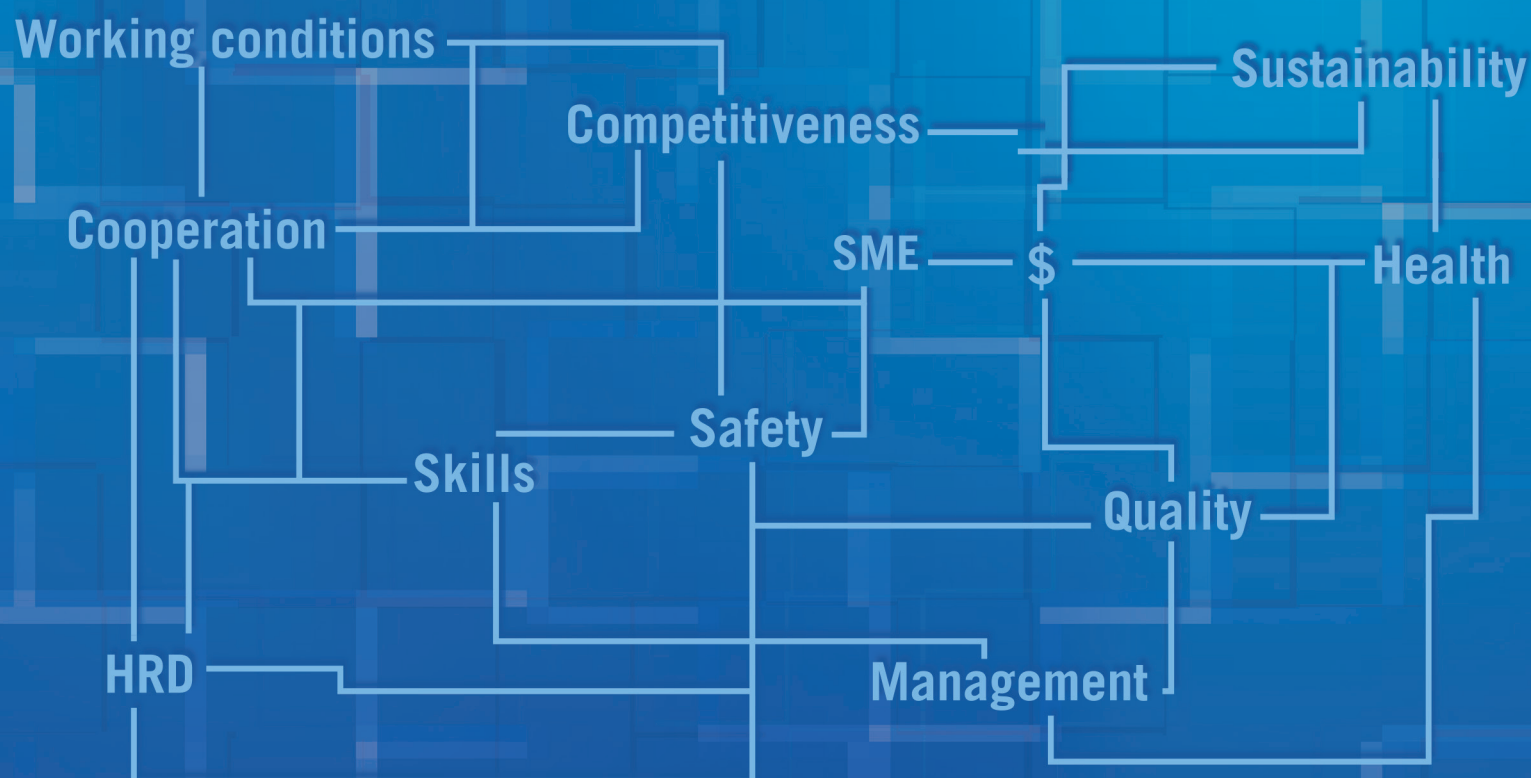


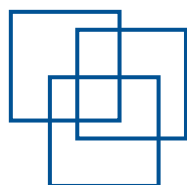


International
Labour
Office
Geneva



Can better working conditions improve the performance of SMEs?

An international literature review



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An international literature review

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Can better working conditions improve the performance of SMEs?

An international literature review

Richard Croucher
Bianca Stumbitz
Michael Quinlan
Ian Vickers

This project has been commissioned by the International Labour Office (ILO)
as a contribution to the Global Product 154 and the Area of Critical Importance,
“Productivity and working conditions in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)”

Foreword

It is widely recognized that competitive private enterprise is the principal source of economic growth and wealth globally and makes a substantial contribution to poverty reduction. Although large and multinational enterprises have the higher public profile, the majority of businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). They are estimated to be responsible for over 50 per cent of the new jobs created globally and, in most developing and emerging countries, they also employ more people than do large enterprises.

Given their importance as employers, SMEs clearly have the potential to contribute to the social and economic progress for workers and their communities. However, many SMEs – particularly those in developing and emerging countries – are not achieving this potential. Frequently, their employment is in low-quality and low-skilled jobs that offer low wages under poor and unsafe working conditions. In addition, SMEs often fall short in terms of productivity, competitiveness and market share.

The ILO has long been convinced that, by improving working conditions, safety and skills in SMES, productivity and profitability can also be improved: a win-win scenario that is good for workers, enterprise owner, communities and economies. In June 2012, specialists from four ILO departments came together to implement a joint programme of work to explore how to help and encourage SMEs to achieve this.

This independent research review was commissioned by ILO in order to contribute to establishing a solid empirical basis for future research and interventions. It reviews the empirical relevance of the assumption that a win-win scenario exists in SMEs, especially in the context of developing economies. It also seeks to identify the factors or conditions that influence its emergence. More broadly, the report builds upon a thorough review of international literature to present responses to a range of enquiries relating to the links between working conditions, safety and health, skills and productivity.

Not surprisingly, the answers contained in this report are often conditional and are far from categorical. Although the report suggests that a win-win scenario may exist, in certain circumstances, it also underlines that more empirical research is needed, particularly in developing and emerging economies.

The report was written by reputed academics from the University of Middlesex, United Kingdom, led by Professor Richard Croucher. The research team brought together an exceptional range of expertise and had a strong international perspective. The report has been enriched by comments and suggestions from ILO colleagues in many departments and field offices, drawing in particular on expertise in skills and employability, working conditions, occupational health and safety, and enterprise development. The report was presented initially at an international research conference, held in Geneva in May 2013, which brought together sixty participants – researchers, development practitioners and enterprise support service providers – from all over the globe to discuss the “win-win” premise. The presentations made at this conference, and the comments received on the report from participants, have further strengthened the study.

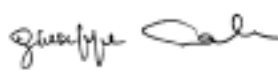
This report will inform the ILO’s future work on “Productivity and Working Conditions in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)”, which has now been identified as an *Area of Critical Importance* (ACI) for the Organization.



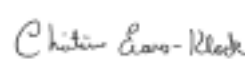
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The authors were supported in their work by a small team of researchers, all of whom made an important contribution to this review: Wendy Banfield, Michael Brookes, Thomas Lange, Suzan Lewis, John McIlroy, Lilian Miles, Daniel Ozarow and Marian Rizov.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ANZAM	Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management
BSI	British Standards Institution
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CSR	corporate social responsibility
EU	European Union
FWA	flexible working arrangement
FAME	dataset
GDP	gross domestic product
HPWO	high performance workplace organization
HPWS	high performance work system
HR	human resources
HRM	human resources management
HSE	Health and Safety Executive (United Kingdom)
IAB	Institute for Employment Research (Germany)
ILO	International Labour Office/Organization
INAIL	Istituto Nazionale per l'Assicurazione contro gli Infortuni sul Lavoro et le Malattie Professionali (Italy)
ISC	International Safety Code (maritime)
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
JEI	Jeunes Entreprises Innovantes (France)
MSE	medium-sized enterprises
MW	minimum wage
NGO	non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHS	occupational health and safety
OLS	ordinary least squares (regression)
OSH	occupational safety and health
OSHM	occupational safety and health management
RBV	resource-based view
REACH	Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals Regulation (EU)
RIDDOR	Reporting of Injuries, Diseases, and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations
SEAGEP	Southeast Asia Gender Equity Program
SHE	safety, health and environment
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
SSE	small-sized enterprise
WERS	Workplace Employee Relations Survey (United Kingdom)
WIND	Work Improvements in Small Enterprises Programme (ILO)
WISE	Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development Programme (ILO)
WLB	work–life balance

Executive summary

Research objective and limitations

This study represents the results of an international literature review evaluating the state of knowledge on the relationship between practices relating to employee voice, working conditions, safety and health, skills development and to positive outcomes in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The review is informed by an understanding that firms' resources and capabilities, and owner/manager motivations, have a role in this relationship, as do external interactions – i.e. the diverse market and regulatory/institutional contexts that condition competitive advantage and enterprise survival.

Some limitations reflected in the review must be acknowledged. First, in order to limit the extent of research involved, it was decided to place a particular emphasis on a specific range of practices. As a result, practices relating to occupational safety and health (OSH), wages, training, working time and 'bundles' of human resource (HR) practice are given particular attention. Fundamentally negative practices such as child labour, forced labour, sexual harassment and abusive managerial behaviours are not addressed, given their obvious negative effects. Second, although the focus of the review is clearly on SMEs, the volume of research directly relevant to this enterprise group (and particularly to micro/small and informal enterprises) is small, especially in the developing world. Finally, while our clear aim in this review has been to ensure that gender-related issues are properly covered, it is noteworthy that much of the research pays little or no attention to gender.

The review reveals an increasing research trend to focus on bundles of practice rather than on individual practices, as an approach that can more effectively translate and link practices to positive business outcomes. Many of the bundles identified as being effective by researchers include independent, non-company-driven voice mechanisms such as trade unions, which although sometimes present are also less common in SMEs than in larger enterprises, even in developed economies. State intervention/regulation and multi-stakeholder involvement are seen to play a significant positive role in this regard, although there is substantial variation in the extent and effectiveness of such influences on firms of different types, size and national contexts.

The review has also highlighted a clear need for further and particular types of research. This includes more longitudinal and multi-level research work, which would allow for lines of causation to be better assessed, and could help identify the specific factors that enable the adoption of desirable practices. Complementary to this, detailed examinations of the differences in relationships created by institutional and cultural environments, and by development context/stage, and the impact these differences may have on the relationships in question, are merited. Finally, detailed case studies that take a process approach would clearly be a useful addition.

Summary of key findings

The literature review did not reveal a body of research that clearly evidences the complex nature of the relationship between working conditions, safety and health, skills development and firm outcomes. However, research has established at least indicative evidence of some links between good practices in all the areas examined, and various types of positive enterprise-level outcomes. Positive outcomes include reduced employee turnover, higher discretionary contributions by employees to enterprise capacities, improved productivity and profitability and higher levels of customer satisfaction and sales.

Occupational safety and health

A considerable body of evidence confirms a link between provision of OSH and positive firm outcomes. This includes many studies that focus on practices, tools and techniques that treat OSH as an essential

aspect of good business practice and quality management. However, evidence of a strong link across a sufficient range of organizations is lacking. This gap reflects the difficulty of quantifying outcomes (particularly over the long term) and the complexity and context-dependency of the processes and linkages involved. Various studies confirm a common lack of awareness of the cost implications of accidents or work-related ill health among SME owners/managers. Research also points to a tendency for SME owners/managers to be reactive rather than adopting a preventive stance towards OSH, often focusing on short-term outcomes rather than investments that pay off in the longer term.

A number of studies identify policies and tools recognized as effective for improving OSH in SMEs, often emphasizing proactive measures that are sensitive to specific characteristics and sectoral differences. These include the provision of advice through intermediaries, supply chain initiatives, targeted industry programmes and the simplified implementation of OSH systems.

Some evidence from international agency interventions in developing economies indicates that it can be relatively easy to promote OSH and productivity in SME and informal economy workplaces through easy-to-apply preventive tools and participatory approaches. In high-income developed countries, some of these measures have become associated with moves towards a “light touch” approach to regulation (particularly with respect to inspection and enforcement practice). However, the efficacy of such approaches is contested, not least on the grounds that their influence tends to be restricted to higher-profile operators and those that are already motivated and receptive towards good practices. This is due to a combination of limited awareness, a lack of consistent stakeholder pressures, negative competition and enterprise-level strategic/ethical choices.

Finally, the review suggests that recent attempts to improve OSH through regulating supply chains (including internationally) warrant attention because they specifically address issues (such as limited resources, knowledge and decision-making latitude, and intense competition) seen to be critical barriers to improving performance.

HR bundles

The review revealed considerable evidence that HR bundles in SMEs are positively associated with outcomes such as productivity, innovation, staff retention and customer satisfaction (albeit in studies mainly restricted to high-income/developed economy contexts). A number of studies also provide persuasive evidence for a causal link between HR practices and outcomes, particularly those examining high performance work systems (HPWSs). Some also show that positive outcomes increase over time, highlighting the importance of examining such relationships over a longer period.

Literature on HPWSs clearly demonstrate the link between the HR interventions under examination, improved employee satisfaction and positive firm-level outcomes. However, it is important to note that HPWSs are not generally applied in micro firms or in the large proportion of smaller organizations, as these do not have formalized labour management practices and their focus is on short-term outcomes.

Wages

Research on the impact of prolonged periods of working long hours and overtime has identified negative short-term effects (such as increased injury risk) as well as adverse health effects (such as depression, strokes and heart attacks), if exercised over a prolonged period of time, and decreased productivity. Some research indicates that moderate overtime can have positive effects on both organizational and individual outcomes, if it is done voluntarily and appropriately remunerated. Some studies focusing on the role of wages suggest a positive association with outcomes such as productivity, although evidence of a direct link is lacking. More positive findings have been found by studies concerned with the higher end of the earnings distribution, including a French study of sustained state intervention that demonstrates how increased earnings may be associated with higher productivity in SMEs.

Studies on the impact of minimum wage (MW) legislation have found highly varied results. Some highlight drawbacks, particularly in developing country contexts. Some research suggests that, although leading to increased earnings of workers who remain employed in the formal/covered sector, MWs can lead to employment at a lower wage in the informal/uncovered sector, or to unemployment. However, related empirical findings do not provide persuasive evidence of a causal link, and work which investigates long-term effects of MWs is very limited. Wages are a common element of HPWSs and some research provides evidence for the positive effects of performance-related pay as part of a set of practices. Research on wages also shows the interrelation with other factors, such as training and working hours.

Working time

The research generally supports the benefits of flexible work arrangements (FWAs), which entail shorter hours, and has shown positive outcomes at individual and enterprise levels. Flexible provisions can increase productivity and improve work–life balance, well-being, satisfaction, trust and motivation among staff and retention of valuable employees. However, there is no strong evidence of a direct link between the two, which may be due in part to different methodological approaches and that FWAs in SMEs are generally made informally, rendering cost-benefit analysis especially difficult. Evidence that FWAs can have negative outcomes highlights the need to consider the work load dimension and how work is scheduled, and that, in combination with low wages, working shorter hours may not provide minimum living standards. This reinforces the need to recognize the context sensitivity and complexity of FWAs and to avoid over-generalization.

There is a strong gender dimension to the subject of working time. Although women work shorter hours in paid employment, they bear the main burden of unpaid domestic work and, in the informal economy of developing countries where working time regulation does not apply, show higher rates of participation. This is also the case in sectors which are well-known for their long-hours culture. Policy-makers in some countries have begun to rethink the regulation of working hours to address such problems, mainly on an industry-specific basis. Changes to work organization have resulted in working-hour arrangements that often weaken or bypass existing hours regulations or present challenges these regulations were not designed to address. The sheer diversity of working hour arrangements presents a logistical challenge to those charged with enforcing minimum standards.

Training

Although it is often stated that larger firms are more likely to provide training than small firms, this observation applies only to formal training methods and it is important to recognize that most small firms provide forms of learning and training that are informal in nature. Findings on training provision are highly dependent on the research approach, i.e. whether focused on formal or informal training, the type of training methods included in the research and the staff group targeted, as well as factors such as the growth orientation of the firm, sector and the role of the national training systems and institutions involved. Although there is some evidence for a link between both formal and informal training and positive outcomes at the enterprise level in SMEs, few studies have been able to provide persuasive evidence that training leads to improved performance such as increased productivity. A large number of studies have acknowledged the importance of taking into account further mediating factors which can influence performance results, although this complexity adds to the methodological challenges involved. The studies that are most persuasive in showing positive outcomes examined training in the context of a “bundle” of HR practices and the long-term effects of training.

Whereas some studies indicate that formal training measures tailored to the specific needs of the enterprise are more likely to succeed than informal training, other findings suggest the opposite, arguing that informal training is most strongly related to positive enterprise performance. In any case, research has shown that small firms *prefer* informal training methods, as they are congruent with their focus on short-term outcomes, low costs and guaranteed immediate returns, as well as the need to adapt to the rapidly changing environment of their markets. Policy-makers need to gain a better understanding of

the drivers of training in SMEs and how they adapt to their rapidly changing environments, given the diversity of these firms and of the contexts in which they are embedded.

In addition, there is a need for future in-depth and longitudinal research on how different training approaches, types of training methods and their design, as well as the type of staff trained, influence the outcomes. Knowledge on the use of specific training methods and their outcomes in SMEs in the developing world is extremely limited, highlighting the need for future research in these contexts.

1. Introduction

This international literature review evaluates the current state of knowledge on how positive improvements in working conditions may also generate positive business outcomes in SMEs. The idea that a business as well as a social case may be made is an old one, stretching back to social thinkers in the early ages of industrialization as well as finding later expression in the human relations school of thought. The argument is highly topical but has also been criticized: hence this review.

Enterprise-level outcomes were initially defined as profitability. However, that measure is problematic, since profitability may not be reported accurately by companies in some national financial and regulatory contexts, especially where company taxation may be affected. It is also narrow, because other measures of company health should also be considered in the long term. We therefore also include all the other measures reported in the literature as key positive mechanisms, such as improved productivity, efficiency, staff satisfaction, reduced labour turnover and innovation.

These benefits have been claimed by those using a linear causal model. The frequently used or at least assumed model posits that “strategic HRM” leads to a human resources management system designed to increase employee skills, motivation and job design. This results in increased discretionary effort and access to employee tacit knowledge which, in turn, improves operational performance, profitability and stock market value. Research into specific labour practices and positive enterprise-level outcomes based on this more or less explicit model has been subject to stringent criticism, which we use as part of our own apparatus in evaluating the research we review. The critique in question is long-standing and centres on several aspects of previous research: its tendency to assume causal relationships; the assumption that their direction is from the practices to positive outcomes; the way that outcomes are narrowly defined if indeed they are clearly defined at all; the lack of specification of the mechanisms that lead to the outcomes; the attempt to find a “universal” paradigm for success that will apply to any company rather than a “best fit” one where specific practices are most effective for particular organizations (Wright and Gardner, 2000*).¹

Moreover, it cannot be assumed that maximization of profit is the sole or even main objective function of SMEs from owner/managers’ viewpoints; nor that they allocate high proportions of their time to maximization of performance. Non-monetary components are also significant. It has increasingly been argued by researchers examining companies, including SMEs, in the developing world that “quiet life” preferences and orientations towards the firm that prioritize direct control are also important considerations (Bandiera, Barankay and Rasul, 2011).

This review surveys the existing research on the relationship between the following specified broad areas of practice and enterprise-level outcomes, focusing on SMEs on a global level:

- ▶ occupational safety and health (OSH)
- ▶ HR bundles of practice
- ▶ wages
- ▶ working time
- ▶ training

These categories have porous boundaries: “working time” is closely related to “occupational safety and health”, for example, and training is a common element of HR bundles. We therefore discuss subjects

¹ All publications included in the Annex and cited in the text are provided with a (*); the list is organized alphabetically and provides significant further details, so that readers may follow up selected accounts of key works as they read the main text.

according to the main area with which we find articles to be concerned, and occasionally in two sections of our report.

The potential scope of a review on the relationship between work practices and enterprise-level outcomes is enormous. In comparison, literature investigating these subjects with a particular focus on SMEs is relatively sparse. Furthermore, the state of knowledge is uneven. Whilst a considerable body of literature exists on certain subjects (such as occupational safety and health), others (such as working time) have been sparsely covered. In order to keep the report clear and concise, we have limited our more extended treatment of work to key publications which deal with the issues generally, as well as more detailed reviews of SME-focused work.

SMEs have been defined in numerous different ways. The ILO's definition encompasses firms employing up to 50 people. The European Commission (2006) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) definitions describe medium-sized firms as 250 employees and less, small as 50 or less and micro as 10 or less. These latter definitions are closer to those used in the literature than others. The European Union's criterion of the amount of financial turnover is inappropriate in most developing world contexts. The relationship dynamics in these three differently sized categories are likely to vary considerably, and the problems with bundling micro, small and medium-sized companies together have been discussed in the literature (e.g. Micheli and Cagno, 2010).

It has been argued that human resource management (HRM) is generally underdeveloped in smaller firms, and that the level of formality increases with the size of the organization (Cassell et al., 2002*; Gray and Mabey, 2005; Kotey and Slade, 2005; Maxwell et al., 2007; Maxwell and McDougall, 2005). In this context, some research also suggests that, at least in some areas, medium-sized firms can resemble large enterprises (Micheli and Cagno, 2010; Vickers et al., 2003). However, Ram et al. (2001) point out the dynamic nature of informality and that the nature of formality may differ as much between firms of similar size as between small and large ones. Furthermore, Marlow (2003; Marlow, Taylor and Thompson, 2010) highlights the risk of creating a dichotomy between formality and informality rather than acknowledging that the two can coexist in relation to different aspects in the same organization. As she explains, the progression from informality to formality is highly dependent on the context of the enterprise and takes place in an arbitrary manner. As far as the literature allows (all too frequently, authors provide insufficient information in this regard), we are therefore sensitive to the different types of companies involved in the hold-all "SME" category.

Another question which has to be handled with care is that of the extent to which it is possible to transfer practices common in SMEs in the developed world to developing countries. Work considering this issue is scarce and there is a risk of creating a simplistic "developed/developing world" dichotomy. At the same time, discussing the applicability of HRM in developing countries implies the view that they should become more like the "developed world" (Jackson, 2003), despite the fact that there currently is insufficient evidence to prove that implementing Western HR practices improves company performance (Al-Husan, Brennan and James, 2009). As has been noted, entrepreneurship in developing countries is found mainly in the informal sector, beyond the radar of employment regulation, and is concentrated in the form of micro businesses (Debrah and Mmieh, 2009*; Jackson, 2012; Jackson, Amaeshi and Yavuz, 2008; Khavul, Bruton and Wood, 2009). However, research in the United Kingdom, a supposedly highly regulated environment, has shown that regulatory frameworks have had only a limited impact on smaller firms (Marlow, 2003; Ram et al., 2001). Much research on regulation is grounded in the need to focus on small firm embeddedness and the impact of socio-economic and stakeholder pressures to better understand how and why they respond in the way they do (Anyadike-Danes et al., 2008; Barrett and Rainnie, 2002; Dubin, 2012; Edwards, Ram and Black, 2004; Kitching, 2010; Vickers et al., 2003, 2005; Yapp and Fairman, 2006).

Peer-reviewed research relevant to this review generally examines the position in high-income developed (or, less often, in "transition") contexts. Extrapolating from these contexts to the developing world is not straightforward. Research on indigenous management in Africa, for instance, has shown the need to match HR practices with local cultural contexts and expectations (Jackson, Amaeshi and Yavuz, 2008). We are aware that the developing world contains other issues which have to be taken into account.

However, given the general heterogeneity and local embeddedness of SMEs, it can be argued that, in many respects, issues around labour management practices in SMEs in developing country contexts may not be as different as could be presumed.

Nevertheless, the environments for SMEs in the developing world may create very different imperatives for them when compared with their counterparts in the developed world. While the implications of this cannot be fully detailed without much more developed research literature, we may hazard some generalizations from some literature. First, the widespread reality that many SMEs in the developing world are in fact formalizations of what were previously small groups of people working in the “informal” sector has implications. It means that these SMEs have histories that are primarily rooted in a struggle for individual survival and therefore have very short time horizons, denying the implementation of any strategy other than short-term survival. Second, their precarious financial bases – often directly linked to a lack of accessible credit and delayed payment by the State or by larger companies – are also likely to militate in a similar direction and not allow for much investment. Third, the weakness and ad hoc nature of management in many of these firms is an issue. Fourth, the employer, trade and professional associations which exist in many developing countries may act as conduits for progressive practices, but often do not include SMEs because of their fees. Finally, the States themselves often have highly fragmented structures and policies which require greater coherence if SME issues are to be addressed in a systematic way (Osabutey and Debrah, 2012).

All the statements made above set some context for what follows, but we reiterate that there is currently only a limited amount of scholarly peer-reviewed literature with a central focus on the outcomes of improving working conditions in SMEs in the developing world. In this review, we will therefore make particular use of research reports published by reputable national and international agencies on the developing world and related questions. Although these publications do not directly fall into our inclusion criteria, they confirm what can be surmised from the literature in developed countries.

This study is structured as follows:

- ▶ Chapter 2 briefly describes the method used to undertake the review.
- ▶ Chapter 3 sets out the theoretical framework underpinning this work.
- ▶ Chapter 4 is the key section and presents the international literature review on the subjects set out above.
- ▶ Chapter 5 provides a brief conclusion.

2. Method

The literature reviewed here largely comprises publications in peer-reviewed scholarly journals as distinct from those produced by institutional actors in labour relations with their own clear agendas. We have not therefore paid more than passing attention to the extensive reports produced by the World Bank (such as their Enterprise Surveys) and the ILO (such as those produced as part of the Better Work project). The scholarly peer-review process tends to improve the quality of research and suggests that publications have been conducted according to certain minimum scholarly standards. In a small number of cases we have included non-peer-reviewed publications meeting scholarly standards and dealing with important issues. Our inclusion and exclusion criteria are stated in table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

	Inclusion	Exclusion
Review period	1 January 2000–30 October 2012, with exceptions for key theoretic works	Not applicable
Linguistic scope	English, French and German languages	Other languages
Type of publication	Peer-reviewed; others included where they addressed issues of central importance and met scholarly standards	Personal views Practitioner literature Works where method not reported, unsystematic or incoherent
Practices	Wages, working conditions, work organization, working time, training, OSH. All must link to enterprise outcomes	Purely technical ergonomic and operations management; other practices where not linked to performance

The research team conducted an initial trawl of articles using a key words search in the large international literature banks, incorporating all work that referred to any of the practices included in the decent work concept. We searched particularly for work focused outside the developed world, and work dealing with gender. We then supplemented this by searching key peer-reviewed journals in the field, focusing on small business and world business journals, as well as in well-researched specialist fields such as OSH. Having identified important authors, we searched under their names. Finally, the references made to other works in the articles we found were followed up. We initially reviewed works published in the 21st century, but went beyond that boundary where we thought the work particularly relevant. We searched primarily for works in the English language, but also included works in German and French. Overall, over one hundred articles were identified as of potential interest.

The articles identified were then screened by the research team. Some were rejected as not being of central interest or not being of an acceptable scholarly standard and therefore were not reviewed and evaluated in detail. However, some of these are referred to in passing if they provide significant contextual or corroborating information. Some seventy articles were eventually selected for detailed review. The reviews were then aggregated; where we found lacunae in the original trawl, further research was conducted in order to ascertain whether these were genuine gaps in the literature or simply the results of an inadequate initial search.

We deal with papers in three distinct ways. First, the most important and central works are reported on in the narrative review that follows. Second, we provide in the Annex a detailed summary report in

tabular form of seventy works which we consider important but which are not as central to our themes as those dealt with in the narrative report. Finally, a complete list of works consulted is provided in the Bibliography.

The review is strong on works in the English language. This may be partly due to the importance of English as the international language for the “business case” in the English-speaking liberal market economies, as well as the predominance of scholarly exchange.

It should be acknowledged that the review covers the literature which the researchers were able to identify, collect and review within the short time frame set for the work. However, we are confident that the main contours of the literature have been adequately delineated. Nevertheless, care needs to be taken with respect to the generalizability of presented work to other national contexts.

3. Theoretical framework: Working conditions and enterprise outcomes

There are two frameworks that, to a greater or lesser extent, underlie different approaches taken to our central issue in the literature we reviewed. They require very different levels of explanation.

The first “common-sense” framework can be simply stated. According to the most extreme and reductionist version of neoclassical economics, the inherent conflict of material interests between employer and employee invariably makes employers seek to minimize costs in relation to employment. Labour markets are assumed to operate well, information is perfect and contracts fully enforced. Therefore, employers cannot enjoy material benefits from paying relatively high wages and providing relatively good working conditions for employees. The view is rarely stated explicitly because it is taken as obvious. A rather more sophisticated development of this view may be articulated, whereby the assumptions (especially those related to information) are recognized as not entirely valid, but the underlying view is often nevertheless in evidence, as much of pre-revisionist literature on minimum wages demonstrates. Although this view is an inadequate theoretical basis for a full analysis of our subject, it must be recognized that the “common-sense” model cannot be entirely abandoned. A perfectly feasible hypothesis is that the cost of improving conditions may outweigh any benefits accruing to the employer. A trade-off is involved; the issue is where the balance of benefits lies.

This study is informed by an alternative framework. The perspectives which together constitute this framework have been identified as particularly useful when researching SMEs. They include the resource-based view (RBV), the dynamic capabilities concept, social equity and company-as-community theory, and finally the idea of “bundles of practice”. The framework is founded on a well-established cornerstone of theory in the field (the RBV) and further developed in line with much recent discussion of how firms may achieve competitive advantage through people. We have drawn on the HRM discussion, but have not chosen a purely HRM theoretical framework, since relatively little HRM literature and indeed what would be recognizable as HRM practice in the developed world relates to developing countries. The paradigm is essentially a North American one. Its applicability outside the United States, including Western Europe, is limited, due to the role of different national contexts (Gooderham and Nordhaug, 2011). There is therefore a need for a more fundamental theoretical paradigm resting on the basic concept of the employment relationship and how it is shaped by the varied market and regulatory contexts within which SMEs operate (e.g. Ram et al., 2001; Edwards and Ram, 2006) rather than on categorizations of HRM which are unlikely to have much explanatory power in much of the world.

3.1 The resource-based view

According to the RBV, an enterprise is a bundle of tangible and intangible assets. Barney (1991) argued that superior financial performance can be achieved, provided that the resources utilized are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and non-substitutable. Management should therefore treat its employees as valuable assets and invest in their training and development in order to gain a competitive edge and superior financial performance.

The RBV was developed to explain companies’ differing capacities to face market challenges; this is very relevant to small enterprises which have high death rates in comparison to larger firms. The RBV has been applied to small companies in relation to their capacity to use their social and personal capital (Sirmon and Hitt, 2003) in combination with their family resources (Arregle et al., 2007), and their ability to survive at the margins of the economy (Edwards and Ram, 2006). It has been criticized for focusing on internal resources, without taking into account external influences (e.g. Boxall and Purcell), 2003; Marchington, Carroll and Boxall, 2003, Rath and Kloosterman, 2000). According to Edwards, Sengupta and Tsai (2010), this limitation of the RBV may be due to its roots in research on large firms which have a greater ability to influence their environments. In small firms, by contrast, the ways in which resources are deployed is “shaped by their context” (Edwards and Ram, 2006, p. 899).

The RBV emphasizes *strategic* choice and the role of the firm in identifying, developing and deploying key resources to maximize results. Therefore, management's strategic capacities are highly relevant and in many cases – especially in the developing world – these may be inadequate to the task (Døving and Gooderham, 2008). Furthermore, the emphasis is on developing, using and protecting *existing* competencies rather than on the ability to develop resources and competencies over time. It has therefore proved incapable of explaining why certain companies are able to adapt to new challenges and external shocks where others are not (Barney, 1986).

3.2 Dynamic capabilities

The concept of *dynamic capabilities* has been defined as the firm's capacity to “integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments” (Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997, p. 516.). It is dynamic capability that allows the firm to respond to the demands of new customers, as well as to regulatory and other stakeholder pressures. This ability is particularly important to small companies faced with relatively narrow and insecure customer bases. There are two essential aspects to the theory. The first is the heterogeneity of human capital which expands the range of possibilities that the firm can exploit. The second is the creation of wider conditions for knowledge exchange and organizational learning (Malik and Kotabe, 2009; Zahra, Sapienza and Davidsson, 2006) that help companies to adapt to changing environments. The theory has been successfully applied to developing world contexts (Malik and Kotabe, 2009), including small companies (Døving and Gooderham, 2008).

3.3 Social equity and company-as-community theory

More broadly, firms of all sizes need to continuously attend to their levels of productivity if they are to remain competitive. Their capacity to do so is not fully explained by market forces. Social equity theory advances an explanation of how certain firms may achieve higher than normal levels of productivity. As Buchele and Christiansen (1999, p. 91) argue, continuous improvements in productivity depend not on individual efforts but on effective interaction among workers, work groups or departments (coordination), and between management and workers (cooperation).

The Nobel-prize winning economist George A. Akerlof (1982) showed that the productivity of individuals' behaviour is determined by the social definition of the situation adopted by the relevant workers. Akerlof focuses on the implicit gift-exchange nature of employment arrangements, where exchange is based on reciprocity and trust and relations are endogenously determined.

Excess remuneration to some employees and leniency of work rules constitute the major gifts by the employer to employees, but others are also envisaged in the model. Employees' gifts to the employer are reflected in effort in excess of formal work standards. In return, employees expect to be treated fairly by the employer. The concept of fair treatment is not based on absolute standards, but rather on comparison of one's own situation with that of other individuals, including employees working in what they regard as comparator companies.

Management is required to make constant efforts to influence employee norms (MacInnes, Cressey and Eldridge, 1985). Employees' willingness to give up the protection offered by rigid work rules, disclose their tacit knowledge, and initiate changes in the production processes that raise labour productivity and the firm's capacity for innovation depend, to a large extent, on management committing to “high-trust” work practices (Bucheles and Christiansen, 1999; Naastepad and Storm, 2006). The indication is that cooperative and group-based employment practices which imply strong implicit gift exchanges will tend to enhance enterprise performance. Moreover, the approach has been related to the idea that through these mechanisms management is seeking to establish the company as a community in its employees' minds. We label this the “company-as-community” approach (Croucher et al., 2011).

The literature we have reviewed shows a spectrum of SME employer approaches to employees and the labour process. First, at the participative end of the spectrum employers may seek (as in some construction contexts) to establish “fraternal” relations and a shared sense of community. Alternatively, they can adopt a paternalistic approach which emphasizes participation in a collective enterprise. A third possibility is one of enlightened autocracy, where the employer creates a certain level of informality while attempting in some senses to give evidence of joint identification of organizational needs. Finally, at the other end of the spectrum we find employers making no attempt to build employee identification. This is often linked to a strong emphasis on cost control.

Trust is likely to be further built by unions or on occasion by collective consultative mechanisms that offer employees a “voice”. These mechanisms may afford a degree of protection to individuals exercising voice. The employee collective provides support, encouragement and some protection to individual workers via its capacity to make sanctions against those threatening its members (Brewster et al., 2007).

3.4 Bundles of practice

Bundles of practice have increasingly come into focus as more effectively translating into positive business outcomes than individual practices (Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 1991). They have been defined in a number of different ways. The most recent work on the relationship between bundles of practice and performance in SMEs by Sheehan (2013) examines a group of interventions that represent a version of formalized HRM, namely: recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, performance-based pay, training and development, employee voice, participation, information sharing and “strategic people management”. Thus, in her study – as in others – collective voice mechanisms are not specified in the bundle; nor are OSH practices. Training, however, invariably features in most specifications (see for example Razouk, 2011*; Verreyne, Parker and Wilson, 2011). In an extensive and rigorous meta-analysis, Subramony (2009*) pursues the HRM performance relationship across 65 academic studies focusing on firms of all sizes. The different complementary bundles of practice identified by the researcher as successful are related to three central themes: employee “empowerment”; motivation; and skill enhancement. All are shown to be positively correlated with performance as measured by employee retention, operating performance and financial performance.

This analytic approach reduces the number of potential variables simply by including a wider range of practices. Moreover, “bundles” have long been shown to provide the clearest and most convincing results in terms of the strength of the links between practices and outcomes. This may be because elements within the bundles are complementary and also because they may combine to send clear, coherent and comprehensive messages to employees (Gooderham, Parry and Ringdal, 2008).

Macduffie (1995) stresses that bundles of practice are linked to organizational performance through integration with complementary practices. The link is provided by a strong and coherent overall company strategy. Without such a strategy, which may not exist in many SMEs, bundles of practice alone may not succeed in improving competitiveness. In the UK context, it has recently been argued that relatively well-developed bundles of practice are effective in SMEs and especially in improving their profitability and rates of innovation (Sheehan, 2013). Where small business leaders in the developed world have a strategic appreciation of the significance of HR practices and are able to access external assistance, they are likely to adopt coherent bundles of practice along “high performance work system” (HPWS) lines (Klaas et al., 2012). HPWSs have been conceptualized as interrelated HRM practices that, in combination, develop, retain and motivate a workforce: (1) that has superior abilities in form of outstanding skills; (2) that apply these abilities in their work; and (3) whose work results in these companies attaining superior intermediate indicators of performance and sustainable competitive advantage (Huselid, 1995; Way, 2002, p. 765). Typical elements of such practices include “teamworking, quality circles, training and career development, appraisals and performance-related pay” (White et al., 2003). Details on how these approaches operate in practice, as well as findings regarding their outcomes, will be presented in the literature review (Chapter 4).

While the “bundles” concept has been criticized for failing to fully explain the exact nature of the bundles, weakly defining the mechanisms involved and remaining under-theorized (see, *inter alia*, Wright and Gardner 2000*), these criticisms appear to us to be to a large extent met both by Macduffie’s (1995) work closely linking these practices to other business practices and by the social equity and company-as-community theories discussed above. Economists have also developed explanations of the efficiency of combining practices (Lazear and Shaw, 2007). Moreover, given that bundles will be most effective in promoting company competitiveness in more highly regulated contexts where they are also integrated with strategy, the precise composition of the bundles will clearly vary from company to company.

3.5 Summary of theoretical framework

We expect the empirical contributions to be reviewed in this report to confirm that high levels of OSH, training, wages and decent working time are likely to be associated with strong company performance in SMEs, as elsewhere. There is little reason to believe that the fundamental logic involved will be different in the context of SMEs from those in larger companies, despite the considerable differences that exist between them. While smaller companies will be unable to develop internal labour markets and thus encourage employee involvement in training, developing employee contributions to organizational capacities and building employee commitment in these ways still means that they are likely to benefit in performance terms. The extent to which SMEs in the developing world receive support from national institutional frameworks seems likely to vary very considerably across different national contexts.

4. International literature review: The relationship between improving working conditions and enterprise-level outcomes in SMEs

The following five sections will review key literature on the link between the following practices and enterprise-level outcomes in SMEs: HR bundles, OSH, wages, working time and training. This range of subjects covers those most frequently examined in relation to the practices–outcomes relationship.

As will be shown across the different subjects, the findings in relation to the links above are ambiguous and more or less positive, depending on the practices under investigation, whether they are studied singly or as part of bundles, and the size of firms and specific national contexts.

The next section, on occupational health and safety, includes further discussion of the characteristics of smaller enterprises and the regulatory/institutional factors that variously influence their adoption of labour management/HR practices in different economic contexts.

4.1 Occupational safety and health

A rich and highly developed literature exists on OSH and, while attempting to keep the review brief, we have also sought to reflect this richness. Most of the relevant literature originates from high-income developed countries, with far less from lower-income and developing contexts. We draw on some research reports published by reputable national and international agencies as well as academic peer-reviewed sources. As set out in Chapter 3, the presentation is informed by an understanding of the role of firms' resources and capabilities as well as owner/manager motivations, and how these interact with external influences – the diverse markets and institutional contexts in which they operate.

We begin with an overview of the main influences affecting OSH and the adoption of good practices in a global context, then briefly summarize the literature on the link with enterprise-level outcomes in all (mainly larger) companies. We then synthesize the research on the link between OSH, enterprise-level outcomes and the conditions that motivate the adoption of good practices in SMEs, highlighting key works. The concluding section summarizes what is known about what enables good OSH practice in both developed and developing countries.

4.1.1 Overview of influences on OSH

In order to understand the wide variations in OSH performance, including the extent to which enterprises themselves perceive good OSH practice as being linked to positive business outcomes, there is first a need to understand the range of potential influences and how they impact on firms of different sizes and in different economic contexts.

Occupational injury and disease is costly in both monetary and human/social terms and it may be presumed that this alone would provide a powerful incentive to improve OSH outcomes. However, this presumption is problematic because not all countries place the same value on workers' health and well-being; even in high-income countries the vast majority of financial costs are borne by workers and the community rather than employers; financial incentives can encourage under-reporting and cost shifting rather than a reduction in the incidence of injury and disease; and cost/benefit calculations are unlikely to occur in SMEs and cannot be taken for granted even amongst larger employers (Cagno et al., 2013; Dorman, 2000; Frick et al., 2000; Matthews et al., 2012; Quinlan, Bohle and Lamm, 2010). For example, the systematic literature review by Tompa, Trevithick and McCleod (2007) found only moderate evidence that experience-rating of workers' compensation premiums via insurance company premiums reduced injuries, while there was strong evidence of regulatory citations/penalties having

a deterrent effect. To this could be added the problems of under-reporting and cost shifting already alluded to, as well as recognition that workers' compensation applies to only a minority of workers in low-income countries and a diminishing proportion of workers in high-income countries due to the growth of precarious work arrangements (Johnstone et al., 2012). While the cost-effectiveness of participatory approaches to OSH is recognized by many academics and OSH practitioners, such approaches have struggled to gain wider traction and participatory mechanisms are actually stagnant or being eroded in a not insignificant number of low/middle-income and high-income countries (Benach, Muntaner and Santana, 2007; Walters et al., 2011).

For many larger businesses OSH is a key operational concern, entailing a formal OSH management system that is integrated with environmental and HR management, and with dedicated resources, expertise and data collection (on injuries, incidents and near misses). Using key performance measures is not always effective, especially when they are overly focused on individual behaviour to the detriment of process safety, as a series of catastrophic incidents (including Texas City and Deepwater Horizon) attest. Many small firms do not have elaborate formal OSH management (OSHM) systems, although effective systems do not need to be elaborate; in some industries tighter regulation obliges even small firms to have formal systems, with positive effects on accident rates (Frick et al., 2000; Legg et al., 2009; Walters et al., 2011).

In addition, an assessment of OSH performance must take into account the significant global changes to work organization that have taken place over the past three decades, including the greater use of outsourcing and temporary (including agency) and self-employed workers. A large body of evidence indicates that, overall, these changes have led to deteriorating OSH outcomes (e.g. Benach, Muntaner and Santana, 2007; Quinlan and Bohle, 2008). A disproportionate share of precarious workers, women, ethnic minority/migrant workers and both older and younger workers are to be found in SMEs. Similar problems can be identified with regard to home-based work (such as garment making) in both low- and high-income countries and the rapidly expanding home care sector in high-income countries.

It is also important to recognize that in most, if not all, low-income countries a substantial level of economic activity (50 per cent or more of total employment in many cases – see Benach, Muntana and Santana, 2007) occurs in the informal sector, which is largely exempt from any regulatory or institutional oversight (including basic labour standards and OSH laws). The informal economy is largely composed of micro/small enterprises although some are linked to the formal sector through subcontracting networks and supply chains, including those that produce international brand-name products (electronics, clothing, shoes). The limited available research indicates that the sector is characterized by a concentration of vulnerable workers (children, migrants and women) and very poor OSH – a finding reinforced by the more extensive “grey literature” (Benach, Muntana and Santana, 2007; Iriart et al., 2006; Lowensen, 1998; Nilvarangkul et al., 2006; Rongo et al., 2004; Santana and Loomis, 2004). Over the past decade or more, the informal economy has grown in many countries, both developing and developed; in the latter it is labelled as “undeclared work” or the “black economy” and has also been associated with very poor OSH (e.g. in construction, harvest work, restaurants and the like). Some substantial areas such as domestic work are seldom viewed within the lens of research focusing on SMEs (although it is almost entirely SME-based). In many countries it resides in the informal economy and, as a recent ILO (2013) report found, even where regulatory protections exist they are minimal and poorly enforced.

Regulation can play a critical role in stimulating and shaping OSH activity at enterprise level. In most countries separate bodies of legislation focus on prevention (prescribing OSH duties and standards) and providing compensation and benefits for those suffering an injury or disease arising from work. It is not simply the presence of law but how it is enforced that is critical here. A recent US study found that randomized inspections reduced the rate of workplace injuries, while a Canadian review found that prosecution was more effective than inspection (Levine, Toffel and Johnson, 2012; Tompa, Trevithick and McCleod, 2007). However, even within rich countries, many SMEs are less exposed to, or affected by, enforcement regimes for a variety of reasons. Smaller enterprises are typically less subject to legal requirements (for example meeting the threshold required to establish committees or have OSH representatives) and are, on average, less likely to be visited by labour inspectors (Lamm, 2001; Legg

et al., 2009; Walters, 2001; Walters et al., 2011). Differences in trade union presence, collective bargaining and minimum labour standards (including minimum wages and maximum hours) also affect OSH, with unionization being less likely in SMEs (Walters et al., 2011). Union presence may of itself affect OSH outcomes – something well illustrated by a longitudinal study of injuries in the US coal mining industry (Morantz, 2013).

There are significant global variations in regulatory regimes and compensation systems governing OSH. For the most part, lower-income/developing countries tend to have more limited state regulatory capabilities. Moreover, because of their poverty, state regulatory bureaucrats are often more vulnerable to corruption. While recognizing such problems, Braithwaite (2006) has argued that developing economies have potential to make greater use of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social pressure by developing responsive forms of regulation based on networks with NGOs, social pressure groups and private prosecutions.

An increasingly visible feature of public policy and popular discourse in a number of developed nations in recent years has been around a so-called “regulatory crisis” focused on alleged over-regulation (Hutter, 2005), with the policy debate leading to waves of initiatives concerned with “deregulation”, “smart regulation”, “light touch regulation” and “better regulation”. Current debates and developments follow on from a longer-standing critique of “command and control approaches” to regulation (Sinclair, 1997), which are seen as being inefficient, expensive, innovation-stifling and leading to enforcement difficulties. The critique of command and control approaches has been widely accepted by policy-makers (OECD, 2002).

Related to the above, there has been a trend for regulation to become increasingly “de-centred” from the State (Black, 2005) through the greater involvement of multiple stakeholders (such as business associations, among others) within regulatory space operating through market-based relationships, and also through greater risk-based targeting of inspection and enforcement and lower levels of such activity on the part of state regulatory officials (Hutter, 2011). However, concerns have been raised as to the general efficacy of such approaches, particularly “light touch” inspection and enforcement regimes. It has been argued that such reductions in the official structures aimed at motivating the adoption of good OSH practice may further contribute to short-termism and the perception of some business owners (at least) that limited/poor OSHM is acceptable and will not be detected (Tombs and Whyte, 2012; Vickers, 2008).

4.1.2 OSH and enterprise-level outcomes: Findings for all firms

Much of the research on OSH and business performance fails to take into account many of the complexities identified above (and other SME-specific factors – see next section). Given this and the difficulty of making a simple cost/benefit calculation, the research findings presented here and in the next section need to be treated with caution.

Some studies provide strong evidence that occupational injuries and illnesses impact negatively on productivity, including at the enterprise level but particularly at a macroeconomic level, although health impacts are a long-term phenomenon and difficult to measure (e.g. Dorman, 2000*; Kessler and Stang, 2006; Mayer, 2001; Ridge et al., 2008*; Shalini, 2009). Very few studies have attempted to provide robust econometric evidence utilizing large and reliable datasets (obtaining reliable datasets is often problematic due to reporting problems, especially in low-income countries). One such study by Sheikh, Gardiner and Brettell (2006*) entailed a multi-industry approach, using existing input-output evidence to assess the relationship between OSH activity undertaken by firms in a sector and sectoral economic performance in the United Kingdom. Essentially, the study concludes that the underlying process and linkages between OSH activity and sectoral performance are complex, and fails to clarify whether greater OSH stringency leads to a fall in output and productivity in firms as they struggle to meet stricter regulatory requirements, or whether – following the “Porter hypothesis” (Porter and van der Linde, 1995) – greater regulatory stringency stimulates innovation, thereby enhancing productivity.

Other studies on enterprise-level outcomes tend to be conducted from the perspective of particular disciplines and focus on tools, techniques and practices – treating OSH as an aspect of good business practice and quality management. The study by Massey, Lamm and Perry (2006*; also Lamm, Massey and Perry, 2007*) involved a review of the international literature and case studies in the New Zealand context. Contributions from two disciplines were reviewed – ergonomics and occupational medicine/health promotion – with some providing persuasive evidence that a healthy and safe working environment has the potential to increase labour productivity and, in turn, increase profitability. However, these authors conclude that the evidence of productivity/economic benefits from OSH investments remains “tenuous and difficult to quantify” (p.28), particularly in relation to whether benefits are short-term or long-term. Despite evidence of occupational injuries and illnesses having negative impacts on productivity, it is not clear that reducing injury or illness will automatically lead to productivity gains; as such, getting employers to recognize and acknowledge any link between OSH measures and tangible business benefits is difficult (see also Kessler and Stang, 2006).

Other key issues identified include: the potential negative/contradictory outcomes of efforts to increase productivity through OSH (e.g. Goetzel et al., 2003; James, 2006); how best to evaluate OSH measures in terms of increased productivity and potential economic benefits (e.g. Cagno et al., 2013; Cutler and James, 1996; Lahiri, Gold and Levenstein, 2005; Oxenburgh, 1991; Oxenburgh and Marlow, 2005); the need for a good level of cooperation between management and employees in order to ensure the success of OSH interventions and related increases in productivity. Contradictory programmes are not uncommon. Examples include health promotion programmes (dealing with fatigue, obesity or lack of exercise) that take no account of work organization, work hours/timing or financial incentives to work in an unhealthy way, such as truck drivers paid by a kilometre-based rate (for a study linking sleep deprivation of drivers to obesity see Buxton et al., 2009). Further, use of sick days/absence as an outcome measure is problematic, given the evidence of widespread long-hour and sickness presenteeism due in part to job insecurity (e.g. Chatterji and Tilley, 2002; Goetzel et al., 2004; Johns, 2011).

Gender is barely considered in most of the literature relevant to OSH and positive outcomes for enterprises, although some literature addresses the extent to which women face particular OSH issues (e.g. Choi, 2005*; ILO, 2013; Islam et al., 2001). Choi’s investigation of both developing (South-East Asia) and developed (Canada) contexts found problems for women common to both areas related to their longer hours of work compared to their male counterparts (double workday), their greater involvement in shift work and their caring role for family and friends. Problems more specific to developing countries included poor access to training and protective equipment, and insufficient legislation to protect women’s rights. Problems that were more specific to the developed country context included obesity, smoking and women not being included in health research. Some findings reported below (Section 4.1.3) also address the extent to which women bring a different attitude to the management of OSH risks compared to men.

To conclude, although there is strong evidence that injuries and illness impact negatively on productivity both at the enterprise and at the macro level, it remains difficult to demonstrate that enterprise-level OSH investments will automatically lead to improved productivity and other benefits for all enterprises. This is not surprising, given the long-term nature of the issues (particularly health) and the data limitations affecting all such studies, as well as the uneven and variably enforced nature of the regulatory/institutional influences affecting SMEs in particular, as will be further explored below. As indicated earlier, such assessments need to take account of the highly variable (over time and place) regulatory and institutional contexts. Most recently, for instance, this includes an erosion of worker voice due to declining union representation (Morantz, 2013).

4.1.3 OSH and enterprise-level outcomes in SMEs

SMEs and small firms have been a growing focus of OSH research and policy attention over the last decade or so, reflecting concern as to how these enterprises can be encouraged to adopt good OSH

management practices and be compliant with regulatory requirements.² Micro/small firms in particular are often seen as relatively problematic compared to large enterprises, for a number of reasons related to features of their organizational and work cultures and the contexts in which they operate. In addition, research has demonstrated the need to distinguish sharply between micro/small and medium enterprises, as the latter can be more like large organizations in OSH and HR policy and practice (Micheli and Cagno, 2010; Vickers et al., 2003). Vulnerability factors identified as explaining the higher risk of injury and illness facing people in small firms include (e.g. Nichols, 1997; Walters, 2001, 2002; Wright, 1998):

- ▶ being resource-constrained: they are often less willing to invest in OSH preventative measures such as training, plant and equipment;
- ▶ high failure/turnover rates characteristic of small business (especially in some sectors) discourage all but short-term planning and decision-making;
- ▶ having a lower profile and hence little fear of losing business as a result of adverse publicity and regulatory attention;
- ▶ organizational and work cultures being strongly aligned to the personality of the owner/manager and the closeness of workplace relationships;
- ▶ exhibiting a preference for more informal approaches to management than is the case in larger businesses;
- ▶ owner/managers often possessing an antipathy to government intervention in the form of regulation; and
- ▶ worker insecurity stemming from a lack of formal representative participation; economic vulnerability and concerns over job security; the lack of regulation and the amount of informal/undeclared work that takes place in this sector; and the disproportionate representation of disadvantaged groups.

Equally important, much of the literature on OSH in SMEs fails to recognize that many operate towards the bottom of a supply chain or subcontracting network and that this can influence the competitive pressures they are under and the decision-making processes which affect OSH. For example, small road transport operators face considerable pressure from larger operators and powerful clients (Mayhew and Quinlan, 2006). Although mandatory supply chain regulation such as REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals) in the European Union (Walters, 2008) can have positive effects, regulation of this type is exceptional.

More positively, there is evidence (at least from developed countries) that occupational stress is more often reported in large organizations (Smith et al., 2000; Smith, Johal and Wadsworth, 2000) and that a significantly greater proportion of employees in small businesses express high or very high levels of job satisfaction (Cully et al., 1999; Forth, Bewley and Bryson, 2006). SME characteristics that can be a positive influence on OSH outcomes include close and reciprocal workplace relations. These can involve a paternalistic concern to protect the workforce, as epitomized in some family businesses (Vickers et al., 2005), behavioural characteristics of flexibility and responsiveness to customer needs and embeddedness within their social and economic contexts (Anyadike-Danes et al., 2008; Barrett and Rainnie, 2002; Dubin, 2012; Edwards, Ram and Black, 2004; Kitching, 2010; Vickers et al., 2003, 2005; Yapp and Fairman, 2006). Similarly, owners/managers exhibit a range of motivations and aspirations, not all of which are monetary, and they may be satisfied with relatively low levels of business performance (Cliff, 1998; Gimeno et al., 1997; Storey et al., 2010*). As previously mentioned, few studies examine gender, although some touch on the extent to which women (as both managers and employees) bring a more caring and risk-averse attitude to OSH issues (e.g. Baldock et al., 2006*; Vickers et al., 2003).

2 European Union data (EU-OSHA, available at <http://www.osha.europa.eu>) shows that for the 'old' EU-15 Member States nearly 19 million SMEs, employing about 75 million people contributed 82 per cent of all occupational injuries, rising to about 90 per cent of fatal accidents.

Findings from key studies

The extent to which smaller firms are at a competitive disadvantage due to the costs and time involved in compliance with regulations has been a topic of some concern in the literature (e.g. Chittenden, Kauser and Poutziouris., 2000; Lancaster et al., 2001; Wright et al., 1999). The study by Lancaster et al. (2003*), involving a survey (n=2,015) of UK organizations across a range of sizes and sectors and 30 follow-up interviews, confirmed the costs of OSH compliance to be disproportionate across different sizes, with large organizations being more likely to report that benefits outweighed costs. It should be noted, however, that not all studies have found the compliance costs for SMEs to be proportionately greater; behaviour can also be shaped by ignorance of regulations or even a calculation that non-compliance will not be detected and will bring competitive advantages (Mayhew and Quinlan, 1997).

Lancaster et al. (2003*) found very few organizations which measured the impact of their OSH activities, resulting in very little information on which to base an objective assessment of the costs and benefits involved. SMEs were less likely to have performance measures and targets in place and were therefore more reliant on their intuitive perception of the benefits and costs. This is hardly surprising as, apart from resource constraints facing many SMEs, their size means that incidents and injuries, especially serious ones, are too episodic to enable meaningful analysis. Construction and manufacturing, both higher-risk sectors, were most likely to report specific benefits and to have performance measures and targets in place to support such judgements.

When asked about the effectiveness of actions in relation to a specific range of potential outcomes (e.g. performance/productivity, staff morale, sickness absence, time lost through accidents, etc.), over half of all organizations reported that their actions had not had any effects, whether positive or negative. The main motivators of formal OSH systems were legal obligation (particularly in larger organizations), OSH publicity (particularly in SMEs), and requirements from existing internal systems and procedures. The absence of formal OSH measures was attributed to factors such as lack of knowledge, the small scale of the operations involved, low priority, time restrictions and lack of information and guidance. Despite the failure to fully capture costs, the findings are generally congruent with other studies.

Government OSH inspectors were found by Lancaster et al. (2003*) to be a useful source of advice,³ although this varied greatly across sectors and regions. It should be noted, however, that inspectorates often lack the resources to provide such advice to more than a tiny minority of SMEs in rich countries, and in poor/transition countries this option is impractical (given even more severe constraints and the extensive size of the informal sector where most SMEs are located). Further recommendations included improved awareness-raising and possibly training through business start-up and local enterprise initiatives, also targeting via quality standards and certification systems (e.g. BSI, ISO, Investors in People) and the Inland Revenue. The latter proposals have been canvassed over a number of years, although Lamm's (2001) study indicated the most effective form of information provision to be personal and regular (in contrast to providing documents), suggesting that it was better to target the one professional most SMEs needed, namely their accountant (even this presumption is less reliable in poor/transitioning countries).

The influence of various "cultural influences" on attitudes and behaviour towards OSH was examined by Vickers et al. (2003, 2005; also Baldock et al., 2006*), utilizing evidence from a broad cross-section of small UK firms (with fewer than 50 employees) including groups perceived by regulators as hard to reach and influence. The multi-method approach included a telephone survey (n=1087) of firms in five broad sectors and eight ethnic groups (including a "White British" control group), and interviews with owners/managers, employees, inspectors and business intermediaries. Primarily, the main "cultural" influence on OSH attitudes and behaviour was found to be the organizational culture that typifies many small businesses, reflecting less formal approaches to management, the preference of owners/managers for autonomy and the closeness of employer/employee relations. Ethnic background was found to be an

3 Also found by Vickers et al., 2003 and Walters et al., 2011 – the latter study deals with three non-Anglo countries as well as Australia and the United Kingdom.

important second-order influence in some cases. Other statistically significant influences were previous management experience, educational/skill levels, and gender. All these influences, however, need to be understood in the context of the resource constraints faced by small businesses and the key role of a number of external influences. Also revealed by the interview evidence were some cases of ongoing poor OSH practice (resulting in injuries/illness in some cases) which employees in particular attributed to a lack of effective regulatory pressure and employee “voice”.

Further binary logistic regression analysis of the survey data (Baldock et al., 2006*) confirmed marked variations in behaviour, underlining the heterogeneity of small firms and their varied exposure to external influences. Particularly associated with a propensity to make OSH improvements were: regulatory enforcement activity, the use of external assistance with respect to OSH issues, enterprise size and growth performance, management training and experience, and membership of sector/business associations. Regarding gender, there was no strong evidence that female-owned or co-owned firms were more likely to make OSH improvements than wholly male-owned firms. Primarily, inspections on the part of regulatory officials were the most statistically significant influence, although the study also identified scope for more innovative approaches for encouraging OSH-related improvements.

These authors suggest a typology by which enterprises can be differentiated in terms of their attitudes and responses to OSH in the context of varied regulatory/institutional and market pressures: (i) Avoiders/Outsiders – low profile and often non-compliant on a range of issues, driven by short-term imperatives and with low-paid and vulnerable workers; (ii) Reactors – the majority of small firms, with the sub-categories of (a) “minimalists” and (b) “positive responders” reflecting different levels of responsiveness to OSH failures and external interventions; and (iii) Proactive Learners – often higher profile compared to other categories, with valued/empowered workers, good OSH practices embedded in organizational routines and associated with productivity and other business benefits.

Many SMEs operate in a complex subcontracting network that must be recognized when seeking to address their OSH. A number of studies (especially in the construction industry) have highlighted how subcontracting arrangements (invariably involving SMEs) can undermine OSH in low- and middle-income and rich countries (for a Chinese study see Yung, 2009). Some studies examine how this can be offset through a network of influence involving clients and the principal contractors, incorporating practices such as: limiting the number of tiers/layers of subcontracting; establishing a regular or preferred chain of subcontractors; OSH performance incentives and insisting that subcontracted teams have non-working supervisors (see for example Manu et al., 2012). Similarly, Underhill and Quinlan (2011) found that small employment agencies (in home care and the like) could minimize OSH risks more effectively by building more strategic and longstanding arrangements with clients. However, such measures typically remain confined to a small fraction of operators, with others choosing to ignore the lessons or being constrained by competitive pressures. Without regulation it is difficult to see how such schemes can be extended to a meaningful level of coverage. Further, they tend to rely indirectly on a stable regulatory environment and a social context (including media scrutiny, governance and public expectations) where clients may have reasons for valuing health and safety. In many poor and transitioning countries these factors are either absent or weaker.

Jensen, Laustsen and Jensen (2010*) focus on why some public developers in Denmark’s construction industry formulate OSH requirements in the tendering process, and how it can put small, bidding contractors at a disadvantage due to the perception that having to comply with these stipulations will entail resource and cost burdens that they cannot meet. As developers are aware, this competitive contract award system often means that small contractors (and those with fewer than ten employees account for 85 per cent of firms in the construction industry) are forced to submit low bids. Thus they often omit safety, work and equipment parts from the tendering process. The study draws on case studies with twenty developers, including structured interviews with key personnel in each, as well as with small contractors from different parts of the supply chain.

In addition to safety knowledge in small construction firms being relatively poor, Jensen, Laustsen and Jensen found that small firms tended to have less sophisticated safety management systems, and fewer resources to train staff or purchase and maintain the necessary equipment. Amongst those

firms including OSH requirements in the tendering process, motivations to do so were based on the perception that it would result in benefits such as: (a) achieving greater legitimacy in society; (b) an improved reputation and avoidance of bad publicity; and (c) a more effective workplace, despite the increased costs that may be incurred. It should be noted in passing that the risk of reputational damage is harder to apply to SMEs than to large firms, although peer pressure may play a role in smaller communities marked by strong and ongoing interpersonal relationships.

Haefeli, Haslam and Haslam (2005*) explore perceptions of costs incurred due to OSH failures within organizations of varying size and sector, confirming the limited extent to which potentially high financial costs of failures influence decision-making with respect to preventive measures, particularly in smaller enterprises. The study involved 283 interviews with managers, health and safety personnel and workers' representatives within 129 enterprises representing medium-size (50–249 employees) and large (>249 employees) organizations from a variety of industries. Only about 25 per cent of them had attempted to measure accident costs, none had systematically quantified work-related illness costs, and most were unaware of the cost of OSH failures to their business. Accident costs *per se* were not perceived as a primary motivator for health and safety. However, a further research phase involved enterprises collecting real-time records of accident/incident and work-related illness cost data, with 40 individual case studies illustrating the immediate costs incurred. Follow-up interviews demonstrated that participation in this phase had been instrumental in changing perceptions and behaviour with regard to incident costing in some organizations.

Haefeli, Haslam and Haslam (2005*) argue that proactive measures may be more appropriate for small companies, and should take full account of sector-specific differences. In line with Haslam, Haefeli and Haslam (2010) they further argue that, rather than focusing on costs, adopting a wider approach which highlights the “human impact” of workplace injury and ill health may be effective.

Haslam, Haefeli and Haslam (2010) similarly examine perceptions of illness and injury costs in SMEs (n=49; <250 staff) and large organizations (n=80; >250 staff), drawing on 212 semi-structured interviews with directors, senior managers and OSH personnel. The study was funded by the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE), part of the context being its recently initiated “Ready Reckoner” (RR) distributed to around half a million SMEs across the UK (HSE, 2002) and developed to help them calculate the costs of OSH failures (as well as similar aids/tools available from other organizations). Investments in OSH were found to be driven by a range of factors, of which cost reduction was just one, with “human costs” (i.e. impacts experienced by individuals and their colleagues) also considered important. Only 10 per cent of SME respondents and 56 per cent from large organizations perceived injuries to be a substantial business cost, while most were uncertain about the financial impact of work-related illness. It is also important to note that few cases of occupational illness were reported within SMEs; large organizations were more likely to cite such cases and were concerned with potential resulting public relations issues. Monitoring of occupational injury costs had not been attempted by any organizations, although three SMEs and 30 large organizations had assessed injury costs. The benefits of examining the cost of safety failures were recognized by only 12 per cent of SME respondents (compared to two-thirds of participating large organizations) and about half were unreceptive to the use of cost information in OSH promotions. Less than a tenth of SME representatives were aware of the HSE's RR tool, supporting the hypothesis that the availability of such tools and related educational/promotional measures does not guarantee their wider adoption.

Hasle, Kines and Andersen (2009) explore how owners of small enterprises attribute accident causation and what they learn about prevention after an accident, using interview evidence from 22 small (1–19 employees) construction and metal industry enterprises that had experienced an accident and absence of over two weeks. Thematic analysis showed that, after a relatively serious accident, owners predominantly indicted “unforeseeable circumstances” and, secondarily, “worker faults” (similarly found by Champoux and Brun, 2003* and Vickers et al., 2003). Hasle, Kines and Andersen advance the possible explanation of both self- and group-defensive attributions in order to avoid responsibility and blame. The reciprocal and close social relations between owners and workers make it difficult to identify owners as solely responsible for accidents. Paradoxically, learning from accidents seemed rare as the owners tended to abstain from preventive efforts in order to maintain that accidents are

unforeseeable, and injured workers returned to work under the same unsafe conditions as before an accident. Hasle, Kines and Andersen conclude that efforts to improve accident prevention need to avoid such defensive attribution in small enterprises by introducing a positive-learning cycle.

As has been revealed, SME owners/managers often lack awareness of the cost implications of accidents or work-related ill health, and tend to be reactive rather than preventive. Where positive attitudes towards OSH are reported, studies are often limited to relatively small samples, often in specific subsectors, and are subject to “self-selection” bias –that is, it is the better OSH performers (or those that are committed to addressing specific OSH failures) that tend to participate.

The evidence shows the limitations of a narrow cost/benefit approach to enhancing OSH in SMEs and the need for interventions that are sensitive to the characteristics of SMEs and the specific constraints they face. This can include the provision of OSH advice through intermediaries, such as accountants, sector associations, providers of business support and special advisers/roving safety representatives (Frick and Walters, 1998; Hasle, Bager and Granerud, 2010; Lamm, 2001; Vickers et al., 2003); targeted industry or hazard-specific programmes (Morgaine, Langley and McGee, 2006); the simplified implementation of OSH systems (Makin and Winder, 2008); and customised electronic OSHM tools (Cagno et al., 2011).

Insights from developing countries

What literature there is from low- and middle-income developing countries indicates the more limited extent of good OSH practice and policy and the greater exposure to OSH risks faced by workers. Studies published in academic journals tend to replicate similar basic findings to those found on small business OSH in high-income countries, albeit with some context-specific insights (e.g. Kongtip, Yoosook and Chantankul, 2008*; Meite, Baeyens and Dewil, 2009*; Yung, 2009).

For example, Meite, Baeyens and Dewil (2009*) surveyed safety, hygiene and environmental (SHE) practices in 242 (mainly manufacturing) companies across eight West African countries. Implicit in the authors’ approach was that poor SHE performance is symptomatic of inefficiency and waste which, if acknowledged, ought to motivate better performance. Overall performances were found to be poor, with only 6.6 per cent of companies having a basic SHE management system (“good performance”); 50.4 per cent with “below average performance” and 43 per cent showing “low performance”. The authors see performance levels as being largely explained by two factors: (i) leadership and administration; and (ii) planned inspections (i.e. within enterprises) and maintenance. They conclude by setting out a six-stage “improvement process” that could be adopted “with a little goodwill of the SME managers and supervisors” (p.1468) but with no reflection on the likelihood of such improvements being adopted more widely or of the potential of external influences to motivate better SHE performance across the eight West African countries involved.

Regarding gender issues, Choi (2005*) argues that improving women’s occupational health would be best attempted via several measures including mobilizing partners, monitoring and generally improving women’s occupational health status, given women’s lower socio-economic status in developing countries (low education, low occupational status and low income – horizontal occupational segregation). Women are also under-represented as policy-makers and decision-makers in many sectors of society (vertical occupational segregation).

As identified in Section 4.1.1, the informal sector poses a considerable challenge, although it is possible to point to positive developments. A report for the World Health Organization (Benach, Muntaner and Santana, 2007) documented examples of mobilizations by informal-sector workers (notably domestic workers) and broader community alliances to improve OSH (including obtaining worker’s compensation) in Brazil, as well as identifying a series of policy initiatives to improve OSH in SMEs. Similarly, a global OH&S Forum in 2012 organized by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health pointed to growing attention to OSH and failures amongst low-income countries as well as initiatives from global agencies (such as WHO, the ILO, international union federations and NGOs) and supply chain initiatives (mostly via corporate social responsibility or CSR) to address these problems.

The experience of the ILO's WISE and WIND initiatives indicate that it can be relatively easy to promote OSH and enterprise-level productivity using easy-to-apply preventive tools (such as illustrated action-checklists), participatory approaches and capacity building amongst stakeholders (ILO, undated; Kawakami et al., 2011). Lessons for future interventions identified by the ILO's own analysis (p.42) include the importance of developing institutional coordination in support of a unified approach (although this can be difficult to achieve in the contexts involved); the importance of being able to provide strong evidence in the field of working conditions and productivity gains in order to ensure the buy-in of donors, partners and targeted beneficiaries; and that multiplier effects are highly dependent on a "training the trainer" approach, with training often the largest component of capacity-building projects.

Other research indicates limitations with voluntary codes and CSR initiatives, including those imposing minimum labour standards as part of contract conditions in global supply chains. Some studies, such as the Thai study by Kongtip, Yoosook and Chantanakul (2008) identify a positive effect on OSH from export/supply chain or customer pressures. However, a series of studies have found that CSR initiatives offer a fragmented (such as limited coverage) and often inadequately monitored/enforced remedy that fails to empower workers by affording them a role in monitoring or enforcement (Barrientos and Smith, 2007; Lum, 2003; McDonald, 2007; Newell and Frynas, 2007; Pattberg, 2006; Sobczak, 2003). For example, De Haan and Van Dijk (2006) examined labour conditions in workplaces in Bangladesh and Viet Nam forming part of Ikea's supply chain. Compliance with voluntary codes (even those devised by NGOs) can also be undermined by "official" suppliers subcontracting the work to an informal supplier, or avoiding critical scrutiny with the active connivance of local government officials (Jenkins, 2001; Locke et al., 2007; Lum, 2003; Utting, 2007). Although voluntary codes are of some value, especially in terms of initiating international protocols, the extant evidence calls into question the extent to which such codes offer an alternative to mandated standards due to serious limitations in their coverage and compliance (Sobczak, 2003; Pattberg, 2006). Similarly, while the development of international codes on OSH has had some benefits, such as the International Safety Code (ISC) in the global maritime industry, detailed research has found a considerable gap between formal ratification and actual practices amongst a number of Asian countries, including limited participatory mechanisms to enable seafarers to raise OSH issues (see Battacharya, 2009; Xue, 2012). In short, many schemes based on voluntarism experience problems of coverage or traction.

The past decade has seen increasing attention go to the desirability and efficacy of various forms of private and non-governmental labour regulation in global supply chains (e.g. Barrientos and Smith, 2007; Locke et al., 2007; Oka, 2010a and b). Noting the dearth of studies linking labour standards to competitiveness, Oka (2012) examines supplier firms' ability to attract and retain buyers through achieving compliance, utilizing evidence from a survey of 14 major buyers and data from nearly 400 firms in Cambodia's garment sector obtained from the ILO's Better Factories Cambodia scheme. For buyers, considerations of labour standard compliance were found to be more prominent at the pre-order than at the post-order stage: once orders were placed non-compliance rarely affected buyers' sourcing decisions (except in the case of extreme violations such as child and forced labour). The data analysis suggested that better labour standard compliance was a necessary but not sufficient condition for producing for reputation-conscious buyers – with compliance with OSH standards and respecting labour rights increasing the likelihood of a supplier being retained. Buyers' decisions were particularly driven, however, by criteria such as price, quality and delivery time, with diverging practices apparent between different types of buyers. Reputation-conscious speciality retailers were found to have better compliance performance than mass merchandisers, with the former having a preference for rigorous selection, giving higher margins and favouring long-term relationships.

Oka's study is consistent with other research showing that better compliance does not automatically translate to more business and that the costs of compliance and obtaining certification tend to be borne by suppliers rather than being shared with buyers (Ruwanpura and Wrigley, 2011; Stigzelius and Mark-Herbert, 2009). Examples of the arguably superior option of mandatory supply chain regulation can be found at both national and supra-national level (e.g. the REACH initiative in the European Union described in Walters (2008)) but these are rare and confined to high-income countries. Hopefully, the growing awareness among policy-makers of the need to address supply chains as part of a strategy to

improve OSH, and supporting research as to its efficacy, will gather momentum and gain traction in low-income and developing countries (EU-OSHA, 2012).

4.1.4 Summary on good OSH practice in SMEs

There is a growing body of evidence that confirms a link between good OSH provision and positive outcomes for the enterprise, including many studies that focus on practices, tools and techniques which treat OSH as an essential aspect of good business practice and quality management. Evidence for a strong link across a sufficient range of organizations is lacking, however, given the difficulty of quantifying outcomes and that the processes and linkages involved are complex rather than linear/cause–effect and also highly context-dependent. This is unsurprising given data limitations, notably the long-term nature of the issues with some benefits (particularly health) only unfolding over time and not amenable to capture by the existing research. Further complicating the picture (and under-addressed by most studies that have sought to evaluate enterprise-level outcomes) is the highly heterogeneous nature of SME and informal economy contexts across varied national economies, including with respect to differential resources and capabilities, owner/manager motivations, and the highly uneven nature of the markets and associated regulatory and institutional contexts that condition competitive advantage and enterprise survival.

Various studies confirm that SME owners/managers often lack awareness of the cost implications of accidents or work-related ill health, and tend to be reactive rather than adopting a preventive stance towards OSH, often focusing on short-term outcomes rather than investments which pay off in the longer term. Indeed, in circumstances where regulatory, employee or other stakeholder pressures are limited or non-existent, the *reverse case* may continue to be pervasive – that minimal investment in OSHM is perceived as necessary in order not to compromise competitive advantage.

The evidence shows the limitations of a narrow cost/benefit approach to enhancing OSH in SMEs and the need for interventions that are sensitive to their characteristics and constraints, as well as their embeddedness in specific social/regulatory contexts. Moreover, there is evidence that for some SMEs, rather than focusing on financial costs, influencing strategies that highlight the “human impact” of workplace injury and ill health may be an effective alternative for raising awareness of the implications of OSH failures.

A number of studies identify policies and tools recognized as effective for improving OSH in SMEs, often emphasizing proactive direct contact measures that are sensitive to their characteristics and sectoral differences, including: the provision of advice through intermediaries (sector associations, other business support providers, and special advisers/roving safety representatives); supply chain and CSR-related initiatives; targeted industry or hazard-specific programmes; and the simplified implementation of OSH systems and customized electronic tools. Some evidence from the experience of international agency interventions indicates that it can be relatively easy to promote OSH and productivity in SME and informal-economy workplaces through easy-to-apply preventive tools and participatory approaches (ILO, undated; Kawakami et al., 2011).

Some of the above measures have become associated with moves towards a “light touch” approach to regulation in high-income developed countries, including engaging a wider range of socio-economic influences within the regulatory arena. The efficacy of such approaches is contested, however, not least on the grounds that their influence tends to be restricted to higher profile operators and those that are already motivated and receptive towards good OSH practice, with others being unaware of or ignoring the lessons. This is due to a combination of limited awareness, the lack of consistent regulatory or other stakeholder pressures, negative competitive pressures and enterprise level strategic/ethical choices. Critiques of trends towards “light touch” regulation (particularly with respect to inspection and enforcement practice – e.g. Tombs and Whyte, 2012), although mainly developed with reference to developed countries, also have relevance to debates on how effective regulatory governance can be furthered in developing countries. Recent attempts to regulate supply chains – including internationally – to secure OSH (see for example Rawling and Kaine, 2012; Walters, 2008; Weil, 2009) warrant attention because they specifically address issues such as limited resources, knowledge and decision-making latitude, and intense competition, all seen as critical barriers to improving performance.

4.2 Bundles of HR practice

In assessing the state of the literature on office working environments, productive processes and workers' perceptions, Donald (1994) stressed the importance of taking a holistic view, rather than abstracting specific aspects of work and assessing how they were experienced. He complained that too much research focused on one single factor in isolation, a message of wide relevance to the literature reviewed here, given that many works deal with groups of practices (see Annex).

As the nature of HR bundles has already been covered in Section 3.4, this section begins with the presentation of studies examining the link between the implementation of related practices and enterprise-level outcomes.

4.2.1 HR bundles and outcomes

Subramony's (2009*) finding that the identified complementary bundles of practice are positively correlated with performance as measured by employee retention, operating performance and financial performance, is consistent with other studies. One example is a study by Rizov and Croucher (2009), which analyses only marginally different bundles of practice emphasizing employee voice and group practices (see Section 3.3) used in European firms of all types and sizes.

Through rigorous longitudinal work conducted on a sample of UK-based SMEs, Sheehan (2013) establishes a robust relationship between systematic HR practices (for a list of the practices examined, see Section 3.4). She deals decisively with the direction of causation, showing that the HR practices collectively generate better outcomes rather than vice versa. The author also demonstrates that what she describes as "strategic people management" is connected to all three performance measures and that its significance increases over time, emphasizing the importance of investigating long-term effects of HR practices.

Indeed, Sheehan argues that her findings concerning SMEs are consistent with other evidence that the "bundles of practice–performance relationship" has been more clearly demonstrated for that type of company than for others. She suggests that this is because SMEs are more likely to take considered decisions on introducing bundles than their larger counterparts, and because they fear that without them they are more likely to lose employment tribunal cases brought against them. This fear is less likely to exist in SMEs outside the developed world where these possibilities for employment litigation are much less available to employees.

High performance work systems

Separate studies (e.g. Bauer, 2004*) have argued that High Performance Workplace Systems (HPWSs – see Section 3.4 for definition), involving decent work practices, are associated with higher job satisfaction. Taken together, they demonstrate that job satisfaction contributes to positive enterprise-level outcomes (see also Akehurst, Comeche and Galindo, 2009*; Koys, 2001*). Therefore, a package of measures designed to build human capital and also to encourage "empowerment", training, employee voice and employee involvement appears to be effective in improving enterprise-level outcomes in a wide range of companies including SMEs. The interrelationship between the practices appears clear: training raises workers' willingness to contribute to companies' organizational capacities. Relatively high wages also militate in the same direction. Employers show more interest in motivating and involving these employees, whom they otherwise risk losing to other employers (Messersmith and Guthrie, 2010). These findings demonstrate the relevance of the theories discussed in Section 3.3, particularly Akerlof's (1982) idea of reciprocity or "gift-exchange". Whereas, since the mid-1990s, there has been an increasing body of robust work on the link between HPWSs and improved outcomes (e.g. Combs et al, 2006; Wolf and Zwick, 2002*), studies which investigate the effectiveness of these systems in small organizations are still relatively scarce (e.g. Della Torre and Solari, 2011; Huselid, 2003; Way, 2002).

These findings are also consistent with (non-peer-reviewed) work on HPWSs in small firms in the Netherlands (de Kok and den Hartog, 2006a* and b); de Kok and den Hartog, 2006*) and high quality recent research from the United States. In their study of small, young, technology-oriented US businesses, Messersmith and Guthrie (2010) examined the role of HPWSs on enterprise performance in respect of sales growth, innovation and staff turnover. As they argue, HPWSs are designed to motivate excellent staff performance; they aim at fostering “sustainable firm success by building and empowering human and social capital development in the firm” (Messersmith and Guthrie, 2010, p. 242). The analysis is based on a postal survey of CEOs of small firms (excluding those with fewer than ten staff) that were up to ten years old (157 usable questionnaires were completed).⁴ As the authors point out, the fact that the study focuses on small and young firms has important implications which need to be taken into account. For instance, with an average of 25 staff (the median for this study), each employee must adopt multiple roles in the firm and flexibly respond and adapt to the needs of the organization. Furthermore, as argued by Kotey and Slade (2005), the creation and development of HRM systems changes between different stages in the business life cycle. Although HRM practices are seldom a priority in emerging firms (Cassell et al., 2002*), early approaches to HRM often become entrenched in the organization and hence have a long-lasting impact on its future success (e.g. Hannan and Carroll, 1992).

In line with other studies of small business and entrepreneurship (e.g. Carlson, Upton and Seaman, 2006; Covin, Green and Slevin, 2006) and the strategic HRM literature (e.g. Batt, 2002), Messersmith and Guthrie (2010) found a statistically significant relationship between an HPWS index and sales growth, with 71 per cent of respondents identifying sales growth as their primary performance indicator. The authors acknowledge the potential for reverse causality between HPWS and enterprise performance, and highlight the need for future longitudinal analysis to study this relationship in more depth. Since financial performance is only one dimension of business success, this study also investigated the influence of HPWS on producing innovation in enterprises, as well as the role of staff turnover. The hypothesis that firms implementing HPWSs would achieve higher levels of innovation was partially supported (de Kok and den Hartog, 2006a* and b on the link between HPWSs and higher innovation and productivity). Whereas the HPWS index was positively associated with overall product and organizational innovation, no relationship was found with process innovation. Furthermore, in contrast to other strategic HRM literature (e.g. Yalabik et al, 2008; and Way, 2002 in the small firm context) the hypothesis that staff turnover would mediate the relationship between the use of HPWS and sales growth was rejected in this study. According to the authors, this may be due to the particularly low turnover rate in their sample, which may have limited their ability to test the relationship reliably. However, as the authors emphasize, it is the human and social capital created by HPWS that provides the source for organizational benefits, rather than HPWS systems as such. As the authors note, at a general level their findings are consistent with the resource-based view (RBV) and dynamic capabilities discussed earlier in this study (for further research linking the RBV to HR bundles/HPWSs see Sheehan, 2013; Way, 2002).

Of particular importance for theory and practice in the field of HR is the finding that the majority of the participating firms did not have a formalized HR department in place. About 25 per cent of participating firms stated that they use external professional organizations or other outsourcing systems for their HR operations. The findings therefore suggest that in order to improve performance it is not necessarily essential to develop an HR department, but rather to focus on “building HR skills and competencies in general managers and executives” (Messersmith and Guthrie, 2010. p. 257).

These relationships appear to hold in at least some enterprises in developing countries. In the innovative and rigorous work by Locke and Romis (2010*), the authors used a sound mixed-methods approach to study the relationship between bundles of HR practice and enterprise-level outcomes in two Mexican garment factories supplying Nike. Extensive data were available through Nike’s management information system; these were supplemented by and checked against fieldwork. We note that it seems likely, given the concentration of women in this type of enterprise, that a high proportion of the workers involved are women. The study demonstrates that even under the same political and economic contexts (including national regulations and corporate codes of conduct), management practices and the ways in which work

4 The study applied ordinary least squares (OLS) regression.

is organized make a difference to enterprise-level outcomes. In the case study on the two factories, the one with practices including higher average pay, worker choices about overtime, autonomy, participation in decision-making, independent collective voice and training to support lean manufacturing processes manifested higher productivity. It also had lower labour costs despite paying higher wages than the other plant. The more productive plant was wary of mistreating highly skilled and trained workers who could easily leave for competitors; managers feared losing training investment. Workers were trained to stop production when they saw defects. They worked in relatively autonomous production cells. In terms of compliance with Nike's corporate code of conduct for suppliers, more frequent visits to the more successful plant and more open communication between management and Nike's regional staff led to the development of greater trust between the company and the supplier, which in turn contributed to the upgrading of the supplier's production system and positive outcomes.

In their study on the effectiveness of HPWSs in Italian SMEs,⁵ Della Torre and Solari (2011) found that companies which had achieved the largest productivity increase had combined these systems with technological and organizational innovation. In respect of the latter, embeddedness in networks with other firms plays an important role; that is, they share information, knowledge and experiences with other enterprises. These findings are confirmed by Lynch (2012).

Way's (2002) study of HPWSs in the US small business sector,⁶ however, found mixed results regarding the implementation of these systems and superior immediate indicators of firm performance. Although the findings suggest that HPWSs may improve the ability of SMEs to select, develop, retain and motivate a labour force that accomplishes superior employee output, which may be a source of sustainable competitive advantage (as discussed in Section 3.4), they do not essentially cause outcomes that exceed labour costs. However, Way highlights that enterprise performance is a multi-dimensional construct (Meyer and Gupta, 1994), making it difficult to obtain "hard" financial data.

4.2.2 Summary on the role of HR bundles in SMEs

The reasons for implementation of HR bundles are easily stated. As emphasized in the theory section of this report (Chapter 3), it is not individual interventions used singly but rather "bundles" which provide the clearest and most convincing results in terms of the strength of the links between practices and outcomes. The research presented here shows the relevance in the SME context and considerable evidence of the use of HR bundles being positively associated with outcomes such as productivity, innovation, staff retention and customer satisfaction.

Some studies also provided persuasive evidence for a *causal* link between practices and outcomes, particularly those examining HPWSs. In only one case were the outcomes presented as being of a "mixed nature", as HPWSs were not found to lead to immediate improvements in performance. Other studies have shown that the positive outcomes become stronger over time, highlighting the importance of examining such relationships over a longer period. HPWSs also most clearly showed the link between the HR interventions under examination, improved employee satisfaction and positive outcomes at the enterprise.

However, it is important to note that HPWSs in particular are less relevant to micro firms and a large proportion of smaller organizations – and therefore a considerable share of the developing world, given the lack of more formalized labour management in these businesses. Although some of the work discusses HR bundles in developing country firms, it does not focus on small firms, highlighting the need for future research there.

Furthermore, the studies that are most convincing in relation to the causal link between implementing HR bundles of practice and improved performance emphasize that the significance of the positive

5 The research draws on a sample of 984 SMEs (with between 50 and 250 employees) operating in the manufacturing and services sectors in the Milan area.

6 The findings draw on a sample of 446 US firms with fewer than 100 employees.

impact increases over time. Given the general focus of short-term outcomes and immediate returns in SMEs, these findings, therefore, provide another important disincentive for small firm owner/managers to implement such measures.

4.3 Wages

Paid employment is the most important factor determining the level of living standards, particularly in low-income countries which lack unemployment benefit systems. Although, a “job” is generally associated with a regular wage or salary, a large share of workers in developing countries are involved in small family farms, household businesses or in casual or seasonal day labour outside a formal employer–employee relationship (World Bank, 2012). However, the proportions of wage and non-wage work differ greatly across the developing world, and the gender difference is particularly striking. For instance, according to the *World Development Report 2013* (World Bank, 2012), in sub-Saharan Africa non-wage work represents more than 80 per cent of women’s employment, but less than 20 per cent in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

We begin this section with a brief discussion of low pay and minimum wages (MW) before moving to the review of research on the outcomes of different wage levels, as well as debates around reasons for and against their implementation. As the section will show, the subject of wages in SMEs is highly complex and nuanced, particularly in developing country contexts.

4.3.1 The nature of wages

Waged work does not always provide a route out of poverty, with low pay being particularly prevalent in developing countries (Debrah and Mmih, 2009*; Fontes, Pero and Berg, 2012; Lee and Sobeck, 2012; Shalini, 2009*), meaning that workers often have to work excessively long hours in order to provide a minimum living standard (Lee, McCann and Messenger, 2007; Mishra and Smyth, 2013; Seo, 2011). The incidence of long hours is also rising in some European countries and the United States (Bosch, 2009; Lee and Sobeck, 2012; Weinkopf, 2009).

In order to reduce low pay and improve workers’ living standards, MW legislation has been introduced in a large number of countries during the last few decades. Although it is most common to have one single rate at a national level, in many countries the rates vary by region, industry or occupation (Betcherman, 2013).

The subject of earnings in SMEs and their effects is not well covered in the literature (King-Kauanui, Ngoc and Ashley-Cotleur, 2006*). This may be partly due to the difficulty of collecting reliable data when the sector contains many companies trying to remain below the threshold of regulatory visibility. A stylised fact emerging from labour and business economics literature is that large firms generally pay higher wages than small firms and the gap is commonly about 10 per cent (e.g., Besanko et al., 2010, p. 59).

Labour economists offer several possible reasons for the wage gap, including that larger firms are more likely to be unionized and that workers in small firms may enjoy their work more than workers in large firms and thus be willing to accept lower nominal wages. Some argue that the negative wage premium in small firms reflects hard-to-measure aspects of worker quality, such as skills and experience. According to this view, lower wages in small firms might be indicative of employees’ lower quality and skills linked to lower marginal productivity.

Given the prevalence of low pay, MWs have been widely applied in the developing world (ILO, 2012), and are particularly relevant to small firms (Golhar and Deshpande, 1997*). However, the effects of MWs are difficult to obtain, particularly due to the large informal sector in which they (and other regulatory frameworks) are not enforced (Debrah and Mmih, 2009*; ILO, 2012; Neumark and Wascher, 2007). This problem is intensified in the context of SMEs (see e.g. Gindling and Terrell, 2009 on Honduras).

It has been argued that small firms in the developing world exist in a low wage–low added value equilibrium (Debrah and Mmieh, 2009*).

4.3.2 Reasons for and obstacles to implementation of better wages

Low pay and minimum wages

An important question is whether low-paid employment can be a “stepping stone” to a better job or whether it provides a “trap” (Lee and Sobeck, 2012). Research has shown large differences between countries in this respect in both the developed and the developing world. Around the globe, low-paid workers are disproportionately female, often tend to be young, have low levels of education, and are more likely to be members of a disadvantaged ethnic minority, racial or immigrant group in the particular country (Deng and Li, 2012; Fontes, Pero and Berg, 2012; Grimshaw, 2011; Lucifora and Salverda, 2009). The gender pay gap, which relates to the difference in average earnings of men and women, is a global phenomenon, but varies between countries, sectors and income groups (Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi, 2012; ILO, 2013).

Whereas it has been estimated that in France and the United States over one-third of low-paid workers transition to higher-paid employment within a year, in Germany and the Netherlands the proportion lies at around 25 per cent (Lee and Sobeck, 2012). In the case of the Republic of Korea, where the incidence of low pay is among the highest in the world, the probability of low-paid workers remaining in low-paid employment has increased in recent years, in combination with a general increase in the incidence of low pay. Although a policy “menu” to address low pay has been implemented, its effectiveness has been limited due to incomplete coverage of bargaining powers and insufficient benefit levels (Hwang and Lee, 2012). In Brazil, however, low pay has decreased and experience in low-paid employment has been shown to have improved labour market prospects (Fontes, Pero and Berg, 2012). However, Fontes, Pero and Berg. also found that low-wage jobs did not provide a stepping stone for everyone; for men the move to higher wages or unemployment was more common, while women were more likely to leave the labour market. In addition, non-whites were more likely to experience the “low pay trap” and for those with little education, the transition to inactivity was more frequent.

An important limitation to assessments of low pay in developing world contexts is that, although current definitions include waged employees in both the formal and informal economy, they do not consider the vast numbers of self-employed and domestic workers (Lee and Sobeck, 2012). There is therefore a need to find ways of overcoming such constraints in future research (see the Indian study by Rani and Belser, 2012 which addresses this issue in part).

The effects of MWs and increases in their levels have been the subject of considerable debate, especially in the United States. Whereas advocates argue that they prevent exploitation by providing a decent wage to all workers and thereby help to eliminate poverty, critics argue that MWs are not well-equipped to tackle poverty, as they do not reach those most in need, namely those in the informal (uncovered) sector, working in family farms and micro household businesses (Betcherman, 2013). For instance, despite the overall positive influence of statutory MWs and collective bargaining on the incidence of low pay in South Africa, where half of the country’s low-paid employees work in the formal (covered) sector, the incidence of low pay is highest among workers in domestic and informal (uncovered) employment (Oosthuizen, 2012).

To critics of MWs, the non-observance and lack of enforcement in the developing world is unimportant. Neumark and Wascher (2007) cite a substantial amount of evidence to support the view that, although MWs lead to increased earnings of workers in the formal/covered sector, they result in negative employment effects which lead to employment at a lower wage in the uncovered sector or to unemployment. For instance, the results of Gindling and Terrell’s (2009) study on MWs in Honduras suggest that higher MWs (in larger firms) may create more unemployment. They also provide some evidence of the informal sector absorbing workers that may have been employed in the larger enterprise sector without the existence of higher MWs (see also Gindling and Terrell, 2007 for similar findings on

Costa Rica). However, they also note that data limitations do not allow them to provide robust evidence for an indirect effect of MWs on increased unemployment. Other studies have also given rise to empirical findings that are ambiguous and where the comparability of results is often problematic. This is due to a number of factors, such as different conceptions of what constitutes the informal sector, and the different levels at which MWs are set in different industries. Furthermore, where negative employment effects are found, their magnitude is mainly small (Betcherman, 2013; World Bank, 2012). Harrison and Scorse (2010) found no negative employment effects as a result of increased MWs in Indonesia in the 1990s, even in SMEs.

However, in her study on MW effects in both the formal and informal sectors in Brazil, Lemos (2009) finds considerable positive wage effects, but no evidence of employment effects. She therefore argues that MWs could be an effective tool to address poverty and inequality without significantly increasing unemployment (see Magruder, 2012 for research on Indonesia which found similar results). Some empirical research, notably in developing countries, has even shown that a minimum wage hike led to wage increases in the informal sector (Lemos, 2004; Gindling and Terrell, 2004; Jones, 1997; Maloney and Nunez Mendes, 2004), in contrast to the disemployment theories discussed above. This so-called “lighthouse” effect (Betcherman, 2013; Boeri, Garibaldi and Ribeiro, 2011; World Bank, 2012) has been explained as a signal given to the informal sector, causing workers in the informal economy to demand wage increases. However, there are also alternative theories to explain this phenomenon, based on various possible substitution and sorting effects (Boeri, Garibaldi and Ribeiro, 2011; Boeri and Garibaldi, 2005).

As a series of recent studies on low-wage work in developing countries has shown (Bhorat, Kanbur and Mayet, 2012; Deng and Li, 2012; Fontes, Pero and Berg, 2012; Hwang and Lee, 2012; Oosthuizen, 2012; Rani and Belser, 2012), in order to reduce low pay effectively the MW level should be within a certain range (Lee and Sobeck, 2012; World Bank, 2012). There is a danger that MW levels are set relatively high, and are viewed as “unrealistic” by employers and even workers. According to Lee and Sobeck (2012), these “threshold effects” are particularly important in developing countries in which collective bargaining tends to be very low and where MWs are often perceived as being “too high” by employers.

Another study from the developing world (Locke and Romis, 2010*), already discussed in our section on HR bundles above, illustrates the need to also take into account other factors which may, in combination with MWs, lead to positive outcomes. Locke and Romis present two contrasting case study plants in Mexico. Although both plants comply with MW legislation, one pays higher wages. The plant with higher wages had lower unit labour costs and higher productivity. It has to be kept in mind that here higher wages are one part of a larger bundle of practices. Incentive pay is one significant part of this bundle that is often linked to higher productivity, although the links between these forms of wage payment and productivity may be more robust in some cultural contexts than others (Bandiera, Barankay and Rasul, 2011).

Minimum wages in SMEs

It has been argued that MW legislation is more likely to have particularly negative effects on small firms, given that lower wages are more likely here than in larger firms. MWs have often been criticized as being unwarranted impositions on small businesses because they increase employers’ wage costs while productivity benefits remain ambiguous. However, as in the context of MW effects generally, research findings on small firms are very varied and where negative effects are found these tend to be small. In the United Kingdom, research on the effects of the introduction of the national MW in 1999 has shown negative outcomes to be rare (Edwards, Ram and Black, 2004; Ram et al., 2001). Providing detailed case study evidence from 81 small firms, Ram et al. (2001, p.848) found three patterns of response to the introduction of the national MW: “business as usual” with little effect on existing practices; “shock” into more efficient labour management practices which may reflect moves up-market; and moves down-market towards illegal and grey areas of business or out of business entirely. However, they also emphasize that regulations were only partly responsible for these developments, highlighting the importance of the embeddedness of small firms in a web of social and economic relationships. These

authors draw attention to fine nuances in the impact of employment legislation on small firms, resulting from the nature of the law itself, the competitive context of a firm, as well as relationships inside the firm (Edwards, Ram and Black, 2004). They emphasize that employment legislation enforcement under collective agreement is very limited in the small firm context, given that trade union recognition is low and collective bargaining “virtually unknown”. The same is true in developing countries, where union density is often low and collective bargaining reaches only a small proportion of low-paid workers, given that they are least likely to be organized and most likely to work in the informal (uncovered) economy (Hwang and Lee, 2012; Lee and Sobeck, 2012; Oosthuizen, 2012).

A further example of the complexity of factors behind the effects of MWs is provided by Gindling and Terrell's (2009) study of small firms in Honduras, which found no indication of any effects of MWs on the earnings of workers. However, the authors draw attention to the fact that multiple MWs are used in different industries and differently sized firms. Despite the fact that MWs in small firms with 15 employees or fewer are lower than for larger firms, they found that only those with more than 15 staff complied with MW laws. As the authors explain, this non-compliance in the small private business sector indicates that it behaves as an informal sector.

Edwards, Ram and Black (2004) further explain that, in cases of “business as usual”, social relations *within* the firm shape the effect of external influences and existing less formal arrangements are often maintained since both employers and workers see the benefits of these practices. In their view, given the nature of small firms, employment laws have been designed to have limited impact, and support agencies have made little effort to encourage firms to think about ways to improve productivity. They conclude that it is, therefore, not surprising that “positive” effects have been limited (p. 263).

The effects of MWs have also been linked to training. From this perspective, MWs bring negative effects both on employers and their recipients by restricting not only their labour market opportunities, but also their access to in-company training which represents a trade-off (see the review by Neumark and Wascher, 2008). Most of this work draws on national aggregate statistics. However, Grossberg and Sicilian (1999) used enterprise-level data derived from a large dataset of 3,000 firms, predominantly small low-wage employers. The analysis is gender-sensitive and, at its first stage, shows that men who start on the MW were more likely than women to receive no training during their careers. However, the second stage of analysis revealed that the type of job, rather than either MW status or gender, is the key determinant of the training employees receive. These results were confirmed, again through the use of extensive establishment level data, by Fairris and Pedace (2004).

However, these ambiguous results are partly due to methodological problems in measuring the effects of MWs and the variations between MW levels, making comparisons difficult. This problem is further exacerbated by the influence of institutional and economic contexts and the social relations within the firm, which are often ignored (Edwards, Ram and Black., 2004; Lee and Sobeck, 2012; Ram et al., 2001).

4.3.3 Wages and enterprise-level outcomes

Research which focuses on the relationship between wages and enterprise-level outcomes is very limited and extremely scarce in relation to SMEs. Despite a thorough search of the literature, the only extensive (peer-reviewed) studies identified on the wages–outcomes relationship in small firms relate to the subject of performance-related pay in developed countries.

Extensive econometric research on these countries has shown that MWs may indeed improve productivity. In their UK study, Croucher and Rizov (2012) examine the hypothesis proposed by Stigler (1946) that MWs have potential to increase productivity. They examined labour productivity in low-paying sectors of the British economy using the FAME dataset comprising more than 360,000 firms over the period 1994 (five years before the introduction of MWs in the United Kingdom) to 2009, when the level of the MW rose relative to median earnings. They found that productivity was positively affected by the introduction of the national MW. Firm-specific productivity measures were calculated and then

aggregated to the level of low-paying sectors. Difference-in-differences analysis showed that, with only minor exceptions, aggregate low-paying sector productivity was significantly positively affected by the national MW, although the extent of this varied by sector and firm-size group over time.

However, the link between skills, wages and productivity is not straightforward, especially where small firms are concerned. For example, research by De Grip and Sieben (2005) showed that small Dutch firms were often badly informed on the impact of remuneration, as part of wider HR practices, on firm performance. They found that firms did not reward employees' skills according to their contribution to productivity, as (a) employees were "over-rewarded" for their sector-specific skills and "under-rewarded" for the productivity-enhancing effect of their computer skills; and (b) employees' work experience positively affected their wages but had no significant productivity effects. Moreover, it was found that training employees to ensure against vacancy problems seemed to be an effective HR practice, since it increased productivity without affecting the average wage level. The opposite held for higher wages offered to newly recruited employees. It was also found that employing many employees on temporary contracts appeared to have a negative effect on productivity, without affecting the wage level.

Reduced productivity due to changes in methods of wage payment may on occasion be linked to higher profits. An important study by Freeman and Kleiner (2005) examined the last American shoe manufacturers, some of which are SMEs, in the 1990s. They found that a shift away from piece rates to fixed day rates of pay, along with a move to continuous flow production in conjunction with changes to management methods, led to higher profitability. Although productivity was reduced, rate-related labour management policies reduced labour and other costs by enough to offset reduced productivity.

At the higher end of the earnings distribution, where wages are above the median, a recent French official scientific publication (Hallépé and Garcia, 2012) lends support to the argument that increasing wages may have similar, positive effects in higher paying micro and small companies. The French Government's JEI (Jeunes Entreprises Innovantes – young innovating enterprises) scheme has supported companies typically employing around ten employees in the information and communications sectors since 2004 by reducing their social contributions and, to a lesser extent, their fiscal payments to the State. The effect has been a reduction in companies' labour costs by some 13 per cent, with over 4,500 enterprises benefiting from the scheme. The report shows considerable increases in both employment and salaries in the companies affected which, in turn, are associated with increased productivity in the companies. The report also notes the multiplier effect created by the scheme, with employment having increased by some 40 per cent more than the state finance would fund. The study demonstrates not only how increased earnings may be associated with higher productivity in a fast-growing sector, but also the effectiveness of this type of state intervention.

In their study of the effects of incentive pay, training and appraisal systems in Vietnamese SMEs, King-Kauanui, Ngoc and Ashley-Cotleur (2006*) found that a bundle of practices comprising incentive pay, training and appraisal brought comparatively good enterprise-level outcomes. Outcomes were defined through a wide range of measures including improved profitability, sales growth and "improved firm performance". The very wide range of measures adopted raises issues of how these were measured, which is not entirely clearly explained in their article. The best outcomes came from the bundle as a whole, after which incentive pay, training and appraisal (in descending order) played significant roles. However, the findings should be treated with caution, given the small sample size combined with the self-reported nature of the data. Thus, it may be that the priority given to incentive pay reflects managerial attitudes.

The study by Carlson, Upton and Seaman (2006*) drew on a sample of 168 family-owned fast-growing SMEs in the United States to investigate the impact of HR practices and compensation design on performance. Examining the consequences of five HR practices on sales growth and performance, the results suggest that competitive compensation together with training and development, recruitment packages, maintaining morale and use of performance appraisals were more important for high sales-growth performing firms than for low sales-growth performing firms. In addition, high sales-growth firms were found to make greater use of incentive compensation in the form of cash, non-cash and benefits at every level in the organization.

Performance-related pay is an important element of HPWSs (discussed in the HR bundles section above), with a number of studies supporting that such incentives lead to increased productivity (e.g. Lazear, 2000; Osterman, 2006; Sels et al., 2006a* and b). For example, in the research by Sels et al. on HPWSs in SMEs in Belgium, wages and performance-based pay are deemed to be productivity-enhancing practices having an indirect effect by reducing employee turnover. The cross-sectoral study by Black and Lynch (2001) investigated various aspects of HPWSs including profit-related pay, finding that, although only few practices significantly improved total factor productivity, profit sharing for non-managers was one of them. Studies on incentive pay by Lazear (2000) and Bandiera, Barankay and Rasul (2007) both found positive productivity outcomes caused by both selection effects and workers increasing their efforts. Productivity increased among more able workers and decreased among those categorized by researchers as “less efficient”. Selection effects were reflected in those less able leaving the firm and in more productive staff being attracted by the incentive wages.

In her study on HPWSs in British SMEs, Sheehan (2013) found that performance-based compensation had a positive effect on company financial performance, and is convincing on the causal direction of the relationship given the longitudinal research design. These findings are in contrast to the study by Rizov and Croucher (2009) discussed above, based on a larger sample of larger firms across Europe. Here, group-based compensation was shown to have a positive association with a broad measure of company performance, suggesting that it is not only firm size that might be making the difference, but also the different institutional contexts involved, providing further evidence for the complexity of issues influencing outcomes as well as the limited comparability of findings.

4.3.4 Summary on wages and enterprise-level outcomes in SMEs

Overall, research on the relationship between wages and enterprise-level outcomes has led to ambiguous findings. Whereas some research focused on wages alone suggests a positive association with outcomes such as productivity, there is no evidence of a direct link and studies indicate the need to take into account other factors. More positive findings have been found higher up the earnings distribution, notably a French study of effective sustained state intervention which demonstrates how increased earnings can be associated with higher productivity in SMEs.

Studies which examined MWs have given rise to very varied results. Whereas some suggest that they could be an effective tool to tackle poverty, others draw attention to problems associated with them, particularly in developing country contexts. Some research suggests that, although leading to increased earnings for workers employed in the formal/covered sector, MWs can result in negative employment effects which lead to employment at a lower wage in the informal/uncovered sector or to unemployment. It is also the case that studies are unable to provide persuasive evidence of a causal link, and there has been little work which investigates the long-term effects of MWs. In addition, the large variety of approaches to MW regulations, not only across countries but also between sectors within countries, poses a considerable challenge to attempts to compare findings on a global basis.

Wages are a common element of HPWSs and a number of studies provide evidence for the positive effects of performance-related pay as part of a set of practices. Research on wages also shows the interrelation with other factors, such as training and working hours and, as will be shown in Section 4.4, performance-based compensation can also have a negative impact on working time.

4.4 Working time

Working time is an important element of working conditions, and the reduction of hours worked was one of the original objectives of early employment regulation. Most countries have laws or national agreements setting maximum and minimum boundaries relating to working hours, and, globally, statutory hours of work have been seen to decrease over the last century. However, legal provisions regarding working hours differ considerably between countries. Weekly normal hours limits range between 35 hours in France and 52 hours in Kenya, but the most prevalent weekly standard from

a global perspective lies at 40 hours (McCann, 2005; Lee, McCann and Messenger, 2007). Some countries (Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Malta and the United Kingdom) impose a 48 hours limit on total weekly hours including overtime. However, actual working hours do not always mirror statutory maximums and are influenced by the expectations of both employers and employees, as well as by country-specific contexts. Moreover, enforcement practice has been shown to be highly variable, as in the case of MW legislation (Lee, McCann and Messenger, 2007).

Key issues addressed in this section are hours of work and their timing, as well as flexible and irregular working arrangements. The ILO has published extensively on working time patterns (see for example Fagan et al., 2011; Golden, 2012; ILO, 2011; Lee, McCann and Messenger, 2007; Seo, 2011), including insights from both developed and developing countries and a recent report by Golden (2012) explicitly focuses on investigating the effects of working time on productivity and enterprise performance. Long hours cultures are frequent in SMEs (Alves, Bouquin and Poças, 2007; Kodz et al., 2003; Ram et al., 2001; Smith and Zagelmeyer, 2010), given lower levels of compliance with regulatory frameworks, in particular in low-wage employment in developing countries, but also in other regions of the world. However, work which discusses different working time elements and their effects in the specific context of SMEs, particularly in developing countries, is extremely scant.

4.4.1 Working time patterns

Apart from legislation on working hours, a number of regulatory regimes (and many collective bargaining agreements) require break times of a minimum duration during work shifts or if shifts extend beyond a certain number of hours (some also set minimum break times between shifts). The timing of work is also subject to regulation in some countries, including the imposition of penalty payments for working anti-social hours or during public holidays. Some countries also include requirements with regard to minimum hours to cover part-time or temporary workers.

There is also a growing age dimension to working time. There has been a pronounced growth of precarious work arrangements particularly among young workers and older workers, meaning that these groups are more likely to be subject to irregular working hours (Johnstone et al., 2012). Reasons for this include relatively fewer permanent jobs (as opposed to temporary jobs) available for younger persons entering the workforce and the low rate of older workers leaving their jobs (through retrenchment, downsizing, and so on) to obtain secure employment. The growth of precarious work arrangements has been associated with a bifurcation of the labour market whereby one fragment of the workforce (including the self-employed) is working long hours (50 or more per week) while another fragment is working short hours (15 or less per week). Examples of the latter include students working part-time in the fast food, retailing and hospitality industries. The impact of irregular work schedules on older workers has yet to receive much attention (Bohle et al., 2011). A further complicating factor is the growth of multiple job-holding, especially among those in temporary or part-time work in industries such as tourism, hospitality and agriculture (Louie et al., 2006).

Long hours and overtime

Despite the existence of policy/regulatory frameworks dictating normal weekly working hours and overtime limits in national and international labour standards, long hours are still common practice and an increasing proportion of the labour force works *very* long hours (Golden, 2009b). Long working hours have been a subject of particular concern in relation to working conditions in developing countries, where they remain prevalent. Here (particularly in the informal economy) they compensate for low wages and are an important means for workers to earn a living (Lee, McCann and Messenger, 2007; Mishra and Smyth, 2013; Seo, 2011).

In addition to general regulation of working hours there is also some industry-specific regulation, mostly in highly hazardous industries such as mining or occupations where long hours and fatigue is viewed as a serious safety risk, such as airline pilots or bus drivers. While the same principle applies to truck drivers, the maximum hours set for them is well in excess of average or standard working hours

generally (often around 72 hours in a week). Extended shifts are also a characteristic of industries such as the merchant marine, fishing and agriculture/farming.

Long hours are a frequent phenomenon in small firms (Alves, Bouquin and Poças, 2007; Kodz et al., 2003; Ram et al., 2001; Smith and Zagelmeyer, 2010). For instance, in their study on the availability of flexible working arrangements (FWAs) in SMEs in the United Kingdom, Dex and Scheibl (2002) found that one group of managing directors participating in their research argued that senior management routinely had to work long hours to fulfil their jobs. In one case, the managing director reported that all employees in his company had to work long hours and were under immense pressure to meet the demands of a growing business, making FWAs impossible to implement. Edwards, Ram and Black (2004) found differences in patterns of working hours between sectors. Whereas workers in the care homes and management consultancies included in their study did not normally exceed the United Kingdom's 48-hours benchmark, some male workers in a food manufacturing firm regularly worked 60-hour weeks.

There is a strong gender dimension to the subject of working time. Although across the world, women work shorter average hours than men in paid employment (including self-employment), they tend to be disproportionately affected as they bear the main burden of unpaid domestic work (Berntsson, Lundberg and Krantz, 2006; Hämmig and Bauer, 2009; Lee, McCann and Messenger, 2007; Wong, McCleod and Demers, 2011). In addition, in developing countries women show higher rates of participation in the informal economy, which consists of mainly micro and small enterprises where working time regulation does not apply (Lee, McCann and Messenger, 2007). This situation is exacerbated by a general increase in women working longer hours in recent years (e.g. Wong, McCleod and Demers, 2011). There is also evidence for women being over-represented in sectors characterized by a culture of long hours. For instance, a non-peer-reviewed study by Mishra and Smyth (2013) on working hours in Chinese firms suggests that there is a norm of long working hours in textiles, clothing and footwear firms – all with a high proportion of female workers.

Flexible and irregular working arrangements

An important argument for the introduction of flexible working arrangements (FWAs) has been that they would enable better employment opportunities for women (Dex and Scheibl, 2001; Maxwell et al., 2007), though increased employer demand for “flexible” labour was also significant. FWAs take different forms: reduction in working hours or amount of work; or flexibility in the arrangement of hours or workplace (Glynn, Steinberg and McCartney, 2002; Maxwell et al., 2007).

Empirical research focusing on the availability and outcome of flexible working arrangements in SMEs has been relatively limited (Dex and Scheibl, 2001; Maxwell et al., 2007). Analysis of a nationally representative survey in the United Kingdom (the Workplace Employee Relations Survey – WERS⁷) shows that the availability of FWAs is far lower in SMEs than in large organizations (Dex and Scheibl, 2001). However, more recent empirical studies have highlighted the different and often less formal ways that SMEs use FWAs (Bond et al., 2002; Dex and Scheibl, 2001 and 2002; Hyman and Summers, 2004; Maxwell et al., 2007). These findings therefore provide support for the argument presented in the introduction that this informal approach is due to a general lack of formal HRM in smaller firms (Cassell et al., 2002*; Gray and Mabey, 2005; Kotey and Slade, 2005; Maxwell et al., 2007; Maxwell and McDougall, 2005).

In their study on flexible and family-friendly working arrangements in UK-based SMEs,⁸ Dex and Scheibl (2001, 2002) found that many of the beneficiaries of such practices were women, although SMEs tended not to relate their reasons for offering FWAs to gender. In half the firms in the case study the majority of the workforce was female. The authors also identified some inconsistencies in the decision-making process and evidence of its discretionary nature. For instance, whereas women returning from

7 See <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/employment-matters/research/wers> for more information.

8 The authors conducted case studies of ten UK-owned SMEs (<500 employees) and four large companies (>500 employees), based on interviews with personnel managers.

maternity leave were commonly seen as being eligible for part-time or other flexible arrangements, decisions about similar requests by other employees were more often made on the basis of a business case evaluation. This is consistent with the generally ad hoc nature of management decision-taking in this field.

The authors also analysed SMEs in the WERS, finding that 45 per cent made some provisions for paternity leave; 37 per cent allowed changes from full to part-time hours; 23 per cent offered parental leave; 21 per cent job sharing; 11 per cent working from home; 7 per cent flexitime; 5 per cent term-time hours only; 4 per cent had a workplace nursery and 4 per cent offered some financial help with child care (Dex and Scheibl, 2001, p. 415).

Although there is little research on the availability of FWAs in the developing world, what evidence there is indicates the predominantly informal nature of such arrangements. According to Lee, McCann and Messenger, (2007, p. 4), in order to address work–family issues, developing countries “tend to rely more on gender-biased informal employment as a coping strategy or on extended family support”. Moreover, self-employment is another flexible form of employment which comprises three-fifths of the informal economy across all regions of the developing world (ILO, 2011).

4.4.2 Outcomes of different working time patterns

Outcomes of long hours and overtime

Although long hours are common in SMEs, there is little research which focuses on the effects of long hours in these enterprises. The effects of long hours on workers’ productivity and health generally have been well documented (e.g. Allen, Slavin and Bunn, 2007; Dong, 2005; Hanna, Taylor and Sullivan, 2005; Shepard and Clifton, 2000; Tucker and Rutherford, 2005). A substantial body of research examines the impact of overtime and long working hours on occupational injuries and illnesses (e.g. Dembe et al., 2005; Sparks and Cooper, 1997; Van der Hulst, 2003). As summarized by Seo (2011, p. 11), “overtime indirectly leads to fatigue and stress related illnesses, while work hazards such as chemicals, noise and repetitive motion indirectly affect workers’ health and well-being”, whereas excessive overtime can have a direct impact on health. Nakata (2011) examined the mediating role of poor sleep characteristics on the relationship between long hours and workplace injury in SMEs⁹ in Tokyo. The study found a positive association between both long hours and poor sleep with workplace injury, and that the effect was most prominent when these two influences were combined.

The effects of long hours can be both short-term (e.g. acute injuries and accidents) and long-term (e.g. heart attacks and strokes). For example, a number of studies have examined the association between long hours/overtime and heart disease (see for example Virtanen et al., 2012). Long hours can also contribute to health-damaging behaviours such as poor diet (see Devine et al., 2009), lack of exercise and alcohol/drug use (both recreational and to offset fatigue symptoms – see for example Saltzman and Belzer, 2007; Williamson, 2007). Drug use, in turn, can have both short- and long-term health effects.

In the road transport sector (especially trucking), where long hours are the norm, there is an extensive body of international research into the effects on performance, fatigue, health and safety. This includes research on drivers exceeding statutory working hours, drug use, poor diet/obesity, the influence of client pressures/scheduling and payment systems on working hours, fatigue-related injuries/crashes and other sources of injury and ill-health such as extended exposure to vibration and diesel fumes (see for example Williamson, Friswell and Feyer, 2004; Williamson et al., 2009; Saltzman and Belzer, 2007). This research has contributed to an extensive debate on policy solutions to address poor health indices and to promote better practice, including fatigue management regimes with mandatory breaks.

9 The sample included SMEs with 1–158 employees.

Caruso (2006) identifies the associated risks of working long hours as longer exposure to workplace hazards, as well as less time for non-work responsibilities and to recover from work. However, she also highlights the complexity of the factors involved in influencing the outcomes of working long hours, such as the characteristics of the worker and the job, including timing of work/schedule, and non-work responsibilities. Recovery time has to take account of breaks within work shifts as well as breaks between shifts. In addition to cumulative fatigue/sleep deprivation, prolonged work shifts with inadequate break times between them compound the health effects of exposure to hazardous substances (noise, dust/particulates and toxic chemicals, etc). Despite the need to substantially reduce exposure limit standards, in both developed and developing countries such recalibrations often do not occur and the shift to more flexible and irregular working hours arrangements has made it more difficult for standards to be monitored or enforced (Quinlan, Bohle and Lamm, 2010).

As discussed in the next section, the degree to which workers can influence their working hours appears to be of some significance in assessing the effect on work performance, health and well-being. In their study of the work situation and well-being of Dutch employees, Beckers et al. (2008) differentiate between voluntary and involuntary overtime (see also Drago, Wooden and Black, 2009). They found that involuntary overtime work led to high levels of fatigue and low satisfaction, whereas moderate voluntary overtime was associated with job satisfaction, even without rewards. These findings are therefore in line with Akerlof's (1982) theory, discussed in Section 3.3, that employees' willingness to work long hours can be viewed as their gift to the employer in exchange for superior work standards (see also Golden, 2009a, 2012; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010). At the same time, a growing body of research has explored the adverse health effects of presenteeism – both long-hour presenteeism (staying at work longer due to job insecurity, performance management regimes, etc.) and sickness presenteeism (coming to work when ill). Presenteeism is not confined to developed countries but has been found to be common in developing countries such as China (Langley et al., 2010).

Outcomes related to the timing of work and flexible/irregular working hours arrangements

In addition to the duration of working hours, the timing of work and its consistency or regularity (and who influences this) can have significant positive or negative consequences for both employers and employees. However, most literature focuses on the effects of working time patterns on employees. Research which specifically examines productivity outcomes specifically in SMEs is extremely scarce.

The argument that flexible working creates potential benefits for employers has been developed theoretically. Bradley, Royer and Eckardt (2008*) synthesize the literature on work–life balance (WLB) and strategic HRM to argue for a link between WLB, supportive organizational cultures and firms' competitive advantage via organizational commitment and enterprise-specific human resources. Others simply assume that this case is established (see for example Cetinel, Yola and Emeksiz, 2008* in their study of Turkish SMEs).

In conclusion of his synthesis of research on the working time–outcome link, Golden (2012) emphasizes the need to differentiate between those FWAs which lead to short-term outcomes, such as those which enhance individual or organizational productivity, and those which show benefits in the longer term. As he argues, the latter “improve employee health and well-being and satisfaction with the job or life, without raising current labour costs [...] to the extent that it saves the relatively more hidden costs associated with job dissatisfaction and human capital investment” (p. iv).

Some empirical research investigates the relationship between the implementation of FWAs and improved organizational outcomes in SMEs. Although Dex and Scheibl (2001) argue that their findings demonstrate that the introduction of flexible working options can lead to positive organizational outcomes, they provide a limited account of how these benefits materialize. In their study of FWAs in Scottish SMEs, Maxwell et al. (2007) investigated FWAs and their impact at enterprise level.¹⁰ On the one hand, they found positive impacts of FWAs on recruitment and retention, improved employee relations,

10 In their mixed-methods study, they used a survey of 2,560 micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (with a low (10%) response rate) and 18 in-depth interviews with owner/managers. Responses were skewed towards the larger type of company.

motivation, commitment and loyalty, but on the other hand they also uncovered that related operational and administrative issues were viewed as making implementation difficult. The main limitation of their study is the overreliance on owner/managers' perceptions rather than on more robust evidence. Dex and Scheibl (2001) acknowledge the same limitation on their research, adding that reliance on the subjective view of only one informant (the personnel manager) per organization also limits the focus to exploring organizations' flexible working policies rather than gaining a deeper understanding of the real social processes involved and outcomes for employees and over the longer term.

To add a longitudinal element to their study, Dex and Scheibl (2002) conducted follow-up interviews with the same SMEs plus 13 others, including employees as well as managers. A typology of SMEs' orientations to FWAs was developed, ranging from "holistic", through "selective", to "resistant". The "holistic" approach matched workforce needs and maximized benefits for employers, such as growth. Firms in both the holistic and selective categories reported exceptional staff performance and enterprise growth, but this also held for some organizations that resisted FWA implementation despite high levels of stress and dissatisfaction amongst employees.

The above research generally suffers from a number of shortcomings which limit the extent to which it is able to fully capture the processes involved. One exception is some research based on the theory of gendered organizations and organizational learning particularly that which takes an action research approach (Lewis and Cooper, 2005; Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport, 2007). This focuses on processes for implementing systemic changes in organizations to meet a "dual agenda" of gender equity (including WLB) and workplace effectiveness. It has identified a change process that includes defining the business and social justice case for change; surfacing and challenging (gendered) organizational values and assumptions that undermine this; harnessing collaboration; working with resistance; and piloting innovations and wider organizational learning. The case study evidence shows the potential of these processes to lead to positive enterprise-level outcomes including enhanced profitability, improved time to market and reduced staff turnover (Lewis and Cooper, 2005). Although this research has been almost entirely carried out in large companies, it illustrates the change *process* which is neglected in most research on the impact of WLB initiatives. It also shows the importance of systemic change rather than policies widely discussed in the literature.

There is also evidence that FWAs can lead to negative outcomes. Research has linked irregular working hours to adverse effects on health, particularly when workers are unable to exert influence or control on irregular/flexible hours of work (see Boivin, Tremblay and James, 2007; Bohle et al., 2011; Caruso, 2006; McNamara, Bohle and Quinlan, 2011). The proportion of the workforce engaged outside of standard day work times (i.e. shift work) has grown in many if not most countries over the past 30 years. There is a very extensive body of research examining the relationship between shift work and increased risk of injury (especially amongst night workers), fatigue/sleep deprivation, digestive problems, irritability and greater susceptibility to disease, including heart disease and some types of cancer (for a summary see Quinlan, Bohle and Lamm, 2010). For instance, the findings of a Canadian study by Wong, McCleod and Demers (2011) suggest that night work and rotating shift work are associated with increased work injury levels, in particular for women (see also Folkard and Tucker, 2003). Another important example is health care, where long hours in combination with shift and night work are prevalent, and an extensive body of research has examined the impact of these working time patterns on medical errors, patient safety and the death rates of patients (e.g. Barger et al., 2006; Dembe, Delbos and Erickson, 2009; Keller, Berryman and Lukes, 2009).

Furthermore, research shows that those in precarious employment (including younger workers and women) in industries such as hospitality are most likely to be working irregular hours and that this can be associated with sleep disorders even among young workers (see for example Brandi et al., 2008; Rotenberg et al., 2009).

Skinner and Pocock (2008) emphasize the need to also address work overload in order to tackle time-based work-life conflicts, rather than merely hours worked. Furthermore, whereas the findings on overall enterprise-level benefits of HPWSs (discussed in Sections 3.4 and 4.2) suggest that autonomy in start and finishing times may increase efficiency and productivity (Altman and Golden, 2004; Askenazy,

2004; Combs et al., 2006)., a study by White et al. (2003) found that the flexibility in hours associated with these systems can also have negative effects on work–life balance, particularly where appraisal systems and performance-related pay increase the pressure on employees to put in additional hours.

Consequently, while it is often suggested that flexible work is more “family-friendly” this cannot be presumed to apply in all or even most circumstances. The outcome depends critically on who or how decisions about flexibility are made with regard to both the length and timing of working hours. For example, there is evidence that a substantial proportion of those working part-time would prefer longer hours than are available to them (Johnstone et al., 2012). This has also contributed to multiple jobholding (Louie et al., 2006; Bohle et al., 2011) where presumptions about family-friendly flexibility may be even more dubious. Similarly, shorter hours may not be family-friendly if the timing of work is inconsistent with non-work demands (for example requirements to be at work when children need to be picked up from child care or school). In sum, irregular hours of work, unless decided or at least influenced by workers themselves, may make it more difficult to plan or accommodate other activities such as child care, and the same point applies to working at times that directly clash with such activities. The benefits or otherwise of FWAs for working couples depend on the match or mismatch between the timing, duration and irregularity of hours. A mismatch may also place a greater burden on one partner. Research has begun to examine these issues, for example, how women with families cope with atypical work schedules and the impact this has on their own health (Barthe, Messing and Abbas, 2011). Finally, the growth of flexible employment has also been seen to contribute to more workers being employed on an intermittent basis (for a recent study of intermittent work, see Malenfant, LaRue and Vezina, 2007).

Research also points to broader social effects of irregular work. Irregular work generally means irregular earnings and this can have an impact on workers and their families because living expenses (including accommodation, transport, utilities and food) are largely fixed and irregular income makes it difficult to budget (see Aronsson et al., 2005). Other research indicates that insecure work amongst parents can have broader effects on their children, including access to parental leave or even having children at all (e.g. Barling and Mendelson, 1999; Muntaner et al., 2011).

To conclude, the relationship between working-time arrangements and outcomes is highly context-sensitive, depending on the nature of FWAs as well as how they are measured, and little is currently known regarding the mediating factors (Golden, 2012; Ngo, Foley and Loy, 2009). According to Kelly et al. (2008), the lack of knowledge on FWA outcomes is due to the difficulties of calculating the costs to the enterprise of implementing such arrangements. This argument is supported by Dex and Scheibl's (2001) research which showed the informal nature of FWAs in SMEs and the very limited administrative tools applied to monitor costs and benefits.

4.4.3 Reasons for and obstacles to implementation of better working time

Given the more limited influence of regulation in SMEs, in many though not all instances (one common exception is road transport) regulation of working hours is confined to employees, with those in the informal sector or self-employed being beyond the reach of regulation. As with OSH, while variations in the nature of regulation between countries and industries can be important in terms of their effects on working patterns, the degree to which these regulations are enforced also varies considerably and may be at least as influential.

Dex and Scheibl (2001) found the main motivations for introducing FWAs to be legislation, the business case, ethical concerns and employee well-being. Most companies made informal arrangements and owner/managers generally made ad hoc decisions on an individual basis, responding to employees' requests (see also Edwards, Ram and Black, 2004). None of the SMEs researched undertook formal cost–benefit analyses before introducing flexible working options. Although they followed models of decision-making which involved considering the costs involved in the request as well as its practicability, its impact on clients and customers and whether it would affect profits, decisions were often made intuitively. Dex and Scheibl (2002) also point to the influence of workforce characteristics and the level

of flexibility required as factors influential in firms' attitudes. For instance, they found differences in employer attitudes depending on whether their workforce was dominated by married women with young children and on lower or middle incomes, or prime age and younger high-earning male employees.

Reasons for being opposed to offering FWAs included "perceptions of employees, client problems, operational difficulties, the inability to be able to cover for or substitute some employee skills, and management difficulties" (Dex and Scheibl, 2002, p. 43; Maxwell et al., 2007). It has also shown that those forms of FWAs requiring more strategic forward planning are applied by only a small minority of firms, due to a lack of strategic human resource focus (Cassell et al., 2002*; Reid et al., 2002). However, the experiences of SMEs which have implemented flexible working options with positive outcomes demonstrate that these problems are not insurmountable.

4.4.4 Summary on working time patterns

Studies on working time which focus on SMEs are scant. Research on long hours and overtime has identified negative short-term effects (such as increased injury risk) as well as adverse health effects (such as depression, strokes and heart attacks) if exercised over a prolonged period of time, and also decreased productivity. Some research indicates that moderate overtime can have positive effects on both organizational and individual outcomes, if it is done voluntarily and appropriately remunerated.

There is a strong gender dimension to the subject of working time. Although in a global perspective women work shorter hours in paid employment, they bear the main burden of unpaid domestic work. Furthermore, in developing countries women have higher rates of participation in the informal economy which consists of mainly micro/small enterprises where working-time regulation does not apply, and in sectors which are well-known for their long-hours culture.

The research generally supports the benefits of FWAs which entail shorter hours, and has shown positive outcomes at individual and firm levels. Flexible provisions can increase productivity and performance, as well as improve work-life balance, well-being, satisfaction, trust and motivation amongst staff as well as retention of valued employees. However, there is no strong evidence of a direct link between the two. This may be partly due to the varying methodological approaches applied, and the fact that FWAs in SMEs were generally made informally, making cost-benefit analyses especially difficult. A growing body of research indicates that FWAs can be damaging to health and adversely affect work-life balance particularly if workers are unable to influence their working hours. The level of job security and regulatory context (in terms of access to entitlements) may have significant effects in this regard. This reinforces the need to recognize the context sensitivity and complexity of the subject of FWAs, making sweeping generalizations problematic.

Given the focus on short-term labour cost reductions in many SMEs, there is a need for longitudinal studies which examine the overall long-term outcomes of flexible working options. There is also evidence that FWAs can lead to negative outcomes, highlighting the need to consider the workload dimensions and how work is scheduled, and that, in combination with low wages, working shorter hours may not provide minimum living standards. It is important to note the difficulties of collecting data in smaller firms which are characterized by less formal approaches to the management of labour, particularly in developing country contexts where informal employment is a widespread phenomenon.

A growing body of evidence indicates that long hours, shift work and irregular hours are associated with adverse health and broader social effects. In some countries policy-makers have begun to rethink the regulation of working hours to deal with these problems, mainly on an industry-specific basis (such as requiring integrated working hours/fatigue management regimes in mining and transport and supply chain regulation (see Section 4.1 on OSH). These issues need to be factored into any policy consideration of FWAs. Changes to work organization have resulted in working-hour arrangements that often weaken or bypass existing hours regulations or present challenges these regulations were not designed to address (Johnstone et al., 2012). The sheer diversity of working-hour arrangements present a logistical challenge to those charged with enforcing minimum standards.

4.5 Training

As in previous sections, the approach to training in SMEs reflects their general focus on informality and flexibility. There is some evidence, though often ambiguous (Bryan, 2006), of a link between training and positive enterprise-level outcomes. Methodological inconsistencies make comparison of results difficult. Important distinctions have to be made according to the approach (formal or informal) and type of training provided. In order to appropriately reflect the nature of training in SMEs, this review includes any activities which allow managers and other employees to develop their work-related skills and knowledge (Kitching and Blackburn, 2002).

4.5.1 The nature and availability of training in SMEs: A question of formality

It is widely stated in the training literature that both managers and non-managers receive less training in SMEs than in larger organizations, especially in smaller and micro companies (Forth, Bewley and Bryson, 2006; Hoque and Bacon, 2006*; Johnson and Devins, 2008). In their study on the antecedents of training in UK SMEs, Hoque and Bacon (2006*)¹¹ find that training in the sector is associated with larger SMEs, multi-site companies, franchises, the presence of a personnel/HR specialist and multiple memberships of business advisory networks: in short, with the characteristics of larger firms.

However, findings vary depending on the type of training measure included. Particularly crucial is the need to differentiate between formal and informal training approaches. Staff training in SMEs often includes provisions such as learning at a local college; through a government, distance or e-learning programme; traineeships and apprenticeships as well as on-the-job “learning-by-doing” or job rotation (Jones et al., 2013; Kotey and Folker, 2007). Most of the literature examines the differences between in-house and external training, workforce and management training, as well as formal and informal training, often without providing further details on what exactly the training measures include, making comparison of findings difficult or impossible. Even where distinctions between training methods are made, categorizations of these vary. For instance, although external training is mainly associated with management training, it can also include staff training at an educational institution. Furthermore, whereas Kotey and Folker (2007) classify apprenticeship as informal training, in Germany apprenticeship training is a strategic programme, combining in-house on-the-job training with regular attendance of an external vocational school, and leading to a qualification (e.g. Mohrenweiser and Backes-Gellner, 2010; Mohrenweiser and Zwick, 2009). This highlights the need to consider differences in institutional backgrounds as well as country-specific labour markets (Allaart, Bellmann and Leber, 2009).

Training is often defined in narrow terms, referring to structured courses, programmes and events such as workshops and seminars, ignoring more informal training methods. However, as a thorough review of the literature has revealed, such an approach does not do justice to the nature of training in SMEs. In their Australian study of employee training in 918 SMEs, Kotey and Folker (2007) found that informal training dominated different SME sizes, where formal training methods increased along with enterprise size (see also Kotey and Slade, 2005; Webster, Walker and Brown, 2005). These findings are consistent with research from Germany and the Netherlands (Allaart, Bellmann and Leber, 2009), Ghana (Debrah and Mmieh, 2009*; Debrah, 2001) the United Kingdom (Kitching and Blackburn, 2002) and the United States (Frazis, Gittleman and Joyce, 1998). Johnson and Devins (2008) therefore argue that statistics on the availability of training in SMEs may be misleading, as owner/managers aversion to skills and training terminology may be reflected in their survey responses. They add that qualitative research has shown that owner/managers tend to associate “training” with formal, off-the-job provisions, underestimating the significant role of in-house activities. Considering both informal and formal training measures, Jones et al. (2013) found that 82 per cent of their samples were using at least one form of training method.

11 The paper is based on the comprehensive Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) 1998 dataset for the United Kingdom. In total, 16,871 observations from WERS are used. The study uses comparative (Probit and Ordered Probit) techniques. SMEs are defined as enterprises with 250 employees or fewer; micro companies are included because WERS includes companies employing five or more (the WERS sample includes hundreds of small companies and could be still further exploited).

However, there is evidence that training patterns change with the number of employees. Studying training in both family and non-family SMEs, Kotey and Folker (2007) found that the use of formal employee and management training methods increased significantly in both types of firm during the critical growth phase of 20-49 employees in family firms and 20-99 employees in non-family enterprises, and more slowly thereafter. This pattern of initial rapid increase and subsequent stabilization is consistent with research on investment in management training (Loan-Clarke et al., 1999) and Kotey and Slade (2005) for the use of HRM practices in SMEs.

Storey and Westhead (1997) draw attention to how the type of training that employees receive differs between staff groups. For instance, they found that whereas 10 per cent of the smallest firms offered on-the-job training to unskilled workers, this type of training was offered to 54 per cent of employees in firms with 200 staff or more. Furthermore, across enterprise sizes, unskilled and semi-skilled employees mainly received on-the-job or in-company training, whereas the majority of managerial staff received external training. However, in smaller firms training for managerial staff was almost twice as likely to take place externally, while in larger firms (with over 200 staff) it was considerably more likely to be administered in-house.

There is a particular dearth of research on the use of employee training in developing countries. Current evidence suggests that the role and extent of training varies considerably between countries. In Pakistan, for example, according to Khilji (2001) training is considered an unnecessary expense and therefore severely limited; while in their investigation of apprenticeship training in that country, Asghar and Siddi (2008) highlight the mostly informal nature of training provision, particularly in SMEs. These findings are supported by Debrah and Mmieh's (2009*; Debrah, 2001) research on training in Ghanaian organizations. Whereas Budhwar and Varma (2011) point out that, since the late 1990s, Indian firms have considerably increased their provision of training and development of employees as part of a general rise of HRM (see also Pereira and Anderson, 2012), Malik and Nilakant (2011) also highlight the lack of formal training approaches in SMEs.

4.5.2 Outcomes for enterprises and employees

In relation to the HR-performance relationship in SMEs, training is the element which has been examined most frequently (Sheehan, 2013) and is generally suggested to be positive (de Kok, 2002; Patton and Marlow, 2002; Patton, Marlow and Hannon, 2000; Storey, 2004; Storey and Westhead, 1997; Westhead and Storey, 1997). However, if examined singly, the findings are more varied. As this section will demonstrate, the effects of training on SME performance are highly dependent on the training methods included in the investigation.

Enterprise-level outcomes

A meta-analysis of 67 studies from across the world by Tharenou, Saks and Moore (2007) confirms that, although research generally finds a positive relationship between training provision and improved enterprise-level outcomes in companies of all sizes, the factors influencing this relationship are still not fully understood. The study examined the relationship between training and HR practices, performance, and financial outcomes. As they explain, most previous research has found training to be related to organizational performance defined in a range of different ways, which are in turn related to financial performance but with potential mediating factors rarely investigated. However, Tharenou, Saks and Moore conclude from their review that, although training does lead to improved performance in terms of human resource and organizational outcomes, the effect is small and only weakly related to financial performance. This is consistent with other researchers' findings (Gooderham, Parry and Ringdal, 2008). In addition, Tharenou, Saks and Moore found the correlation between training and employee turnover to be very low and sometimes insignificant, which is probably once again due to other factors influencing staff turnover.

This ambiguity of findings presented is borne out by our evaluation of further significant studies in this area. For example, O'Regan, Stainer and Sims's (2010*) research investigating the impact of staff

training on performance and profitability in manufacturing SMEs in the United Kingdom gives little consideration to reverse causality or establishing a link between profitability and training. It cannot be taken as more than indicative of a possible link between training and relative firm profitability. It is nevertheless supported by Chandler and McEvoy's earlier (2000) findings from a similar context that staff training linked to formal appraisal/incentive systems had lower employee turnover, higher productivity and enhanced company performance. In a study of SMEs in Taiwan (China), Huang (2001) found a statistically significant relationship between the proportion of trained staff and positive enterprise-level outcomes, including improved profitability and reduced staff turnover, without acknowledging that other variables may have influenced these outcomes. In their study of 416 small businesses in Belgium, Faems et al. (2005) found that the relationship between training and financial performance was mediated by organizational productivity. In any case, research could not establish a *causal* relationship between training methods and training effectiveness.

However, these overall inconclusive results are due not only to methodological differences but also to variations in the type of training methods included in the studies. In this context, Bryan (2006)¹² draws attention to the need to distinguish between types of training (the majority of literature focuses on management training), as well as whether it is conducted in-house or externally, as this may lead to different results on business performance (Demick and O'Reilly, 2000).

In their German study on formal apprenticeships, Mohrenweiser and Zwick (2009) examine the impact of increasing the share of apprentices on firm performance, and find differences between sectors. Whereas an increase in the number of apprentices in trade, commercial, craft or construction occupations had a positive impact on performance, an increase in the apprentice share in manufacturing occupations led to negative impact. Their research challenges the widely stated argument that German apprenticeship training always leads to net costs during the training period.

Management training has received particular support from governments around the world, due to the belief that the high death rate of small firms is partly due to the lack of managerial skills and knowledge of owner/managers (McKenzie and Woodruff, 2012). In their study of management training in 198 manufacturing SMEs in the United Kingdom, Jayawarna, Macpherson and Wilson (2007) found that formal training was more significantly associated with performance (in relation to turnover, employee growth and survival) than informal training. The research demonstrated that, while SME managers prefer informal training, the use of formal training interventions, particularly those delivered in-house by outside providers or designed internally for specific staff, are most significantly effective in improving performance. Both are tailored to an identified training need and, as Cassell et al. (2002*) and Hendry et al. (1991) suggest, are undertaken as "tactical solutions" to issues faced by a firm, and directly targeted at improving the operation of the business (Patton and Marlow, 2002). Training *intensity* (the number of training initiatives, as used by Hoque and Bacon, 2006*) was found to be less relevant and significantly moderated by firm size. The view that a strategic approach (Tannenbaum, 2002; Noe, 2005) is required in order for training to be effective and deliver the required outcomes is supported by Chi, Wu and Lin (2008) who use large-scale survey data on Taiwanese SMEs.¹³

Storey's (2004) review of research supported the argument that management training has positively affected enterprise performance in six OECD countries: Canada, Finland, Germany, Japan, United Kingdom and United States. He concludes that none of the studies provide persuasive evidence for a link between the two, arguing that the only study which provided a satisfactory conceptual and statistical approach to studying the link (Cosh, Cox and Hughes, 2002) did not find a statistically significant relationship. Cosh, Cox and Hughes suggested that improved enterprise performance has to

12 Bryan investigated the relationship between the delivery of in-house training programmes, external management training and sales growth in small manufacturing firms in Wales. This study also explored the relationship between training and other characteristics that may influence the growth of small firms. The analysis draws on survey responses from 114 small (with fewer than 100 employees) firms in 1996–97, as well as a follow-up survey conducted in 2003, in which 67 respondents from the first stage participated.

13 81.7 per cent of these firms had fewer than 100 employees, which according to the authors is typical of SMEs in Taiwan (China). The study drew on telephone surveys with 816 SME owner/managers, senior managers and human resource managers. It was part of the 2002 annual SME training needs survey funded by the Ministry of Economic Affairs.

be viewed in the context of a “bundle” of HRM activities of which training is merely one element, and emphasized the highly complex nature of the research problem.

In a pair of closely-related articles, Sels and his colleagues (2006a* and b) sought to establish a link between HPWSs (within which staff training features strongly) and enterprise performance in Belgian SMEs.¹⁴ These researchers noted that the “positive story” told by most researchers failed to take into account the costs of implementing these practices in SMEs, where costs are a very significant factor. Their extensive econometric analysis attempted to examine costs as well as benefits. Increases in productivity were shown to be offset by increased labour costs, but despite this balancing out, the overall effect on profitability was positive. The reverse causality problem was confronted directly by the researchers and overcome. Thus, even in the case of these explicitly sceptical researchers, the positive overall effects argument is sustained. In her study of staff training as part of HR bundles in UK SMEs, out of all HR interventions examined in the research, Sheehan (2013) found training and development (involving both formal and informal training measures) to be most significantly associated with financial performance. However, this positive relationship became apparent only after a time lag. The longitudinal design adopted in this study therefore provides evidence for the crucial differences between short- and long-term outcomes. Similar outcomes were reported in the longitudinal studies reviewed by Tharenou, Saks and Moore (2007) (see e.g. Ballot, Fakhfakh and Taymaz, 2001 and 2006; Zwick, 2006). Furthermore, Bryan (2006) found that external management training may lead to a less immediate but more enduring return to enterprise performance than in-house training.

Consequently, the existing evidence remains contradictory. Whereas Jayawarna, Macpherson and Wilson (2007) found that formal training is more likely to improve enterprise performance than informal training, Fuller et al. (2003) argue that informal learning and training also lead to enhanced business productivity. Responding to the recommendations of previous research to adopt a more holistic approach and expand the range of performance measures to better reflect the realities of training in small firms (e.g. Fuller et al., 2003; Johnson and Devins, 2008), Jones et al. (2013) considered both formal and informal training measures in their recent UK study. They found that owner/managers perceived informal training¹⁵ to be most strongly related to positive enterprise performance. This result provides further evidence for previous work, suggesting positive performance outcomes of informal training measures (Ashton, 2007; Evans et al., 2006; Felstead et al., 2009; Fuller et al., 2003). At the same time, their findings support Kotey and Folker’s (2007) research on the general nature of small firms and their focus on informal, low-cost solutions with a short-term focus, discussed in this and previous sections of the report. Their study also supports previous research which found that owner/managers believe that only some types of training methods improve business performance (e.g. Birdthistle, 2006 on Irish family businesses; Lin and Jacobs, 2008; CEDEFOP, 2011).

It needs to be emphasized that these findings are based on owner/managers’ perceptions regarding changes in their company’s performance. They do not provide any evidence for a causal link and do not consider the role of other mediating factors. However, it is also important to note the challenge that the development of a reliable measurement technique for the effects of informal training provides, given that they are often perceived as part of the job rather than an adjunct to it (Kitching and Blackburn, 2002). According to Johnson and Devins (2008, p.6) and Fuller et al. (2003), the acquisition of skills is often incidental, occurring naturally as part of everyday operations.

Outcomes for employees

Whereas the majority of studies focus on enterprise-level outcomes in terms of productivity and financial performance, relatively little attention is given to the benefits of training for the employee. Ahlgren and

14 The sample for the empirical analysis contains small firms with 10–100 employees. HRM practices are measured by an intensity index comprising the extent to which six groups of practices are used. The paper first develops a theoretical framework and then tests the model with structural equation modelling to test for the overall effect of intermediate variables (such as productivity and personnel costs) between HRM and financial performance. In order to address the reverse causality problem, past performance and a one period time lag between the measurement of HRM and firm performance were built in.

15 Informal training methods included training provided at the workplace by employees and “learning by doing”.

Engel (2011) highlight the disadvantages of the informal training approach, prevalent in SMEs, for employees, arguing that the focus on very narrow job-specific skills rather than on offering “portable skills” and qualifications hampers their long-term career progression (see also Fuller and Unwin, 2006). They argue that this emphasis on company-specific needs was also reflected in recent continental European and UK policy developments aiming at formalizing informal and non-formal learning.

Although Devins, Johnson and Sutherland (2004)¹⁶ found that training leads to positive outcomes for SME employees, particularly in firms with a more formalized training approach, they also found staff benefits derived from informal training measures. They assessed the outcome of training interventions in four areas: increased confidence at the workplace; attainment of a qualification; undertaking further training/or education; and gaining promotion. The majority of respondents reported that both formal and informal training had increased their professional confidence. Older people were more likely to perceive this influence than younger people, but less likely to participate in further formal training (this was particularly true for older men). According to Devins, Johnson and Sutherland, this demonstrates the challenge for policy-makers to re-skill older workers. Furthermore, the majority had obtained a qualification by attending training, with women more likely to attain qualifications than men. The majority of employees remained with the same employer. The findings also showed that employees who resigned from their jobs in order to progress in their careers were significantly more likely to do so after having gained a qualification as a result from training.

Devins, Johnson and Sutherland also found some variation in results across different employers and sectors, with employees in the services sector being more likely to have undertaken further training or to have been promoted. As they argue, this may be due to different needs for change in these industries, with manufacturing being less dynamic and offering fewer opportunities for development. However, their findings relating to the question of whether training interventions helped to tackle existing inequalities in the labour market were inconclusive. Overall, although recognizing the role of other factors in leading to positive outcomes, combining these findings with those reporting on the beneficial outcomes of training at employer level in an earlier paper (Devins and Johnson, 2003) the authors concluded that their study demonstrates the “win-win” nature of effective training interventions in SMEs.

4.5.3 Reasons for and obstacles to implementation of training

The approach to training in SMEs is consistent with their overall focus on informality, flexibility and short-term outcomes (Edwards, Ram and Black, 2004; Kotey, 2005; Kotey and Folker, 2007; Ram et al., 2001). Although some research highlights the long-term benefits of formal training programmes (e.g. Bryan, 2006), small firm owner/managers view formal training as costly due to the loss of staff time and therefore an unaffordable luxury (Hill & Stewart, 2000; Kotey and Folker, 2007; O'Regan, Stainer and Sims, 2010). Given their concern with short-term survival, training in small firms is characterized by its mainly informal nature, direct relevance to the job, low cost and guaranteed immediate returns (Daziel, 2010; Hill and Stewart, 2000; Kotey and Folker, 2007; Johnson and Devins, 2008; Khilji, 2001; Storey and Westhead 1997). At this stage, they therefore focus on drawing on existing resources, trying to “do things better” rather than investing on “doing things differently” or “doing different things” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 74).

Storey (2004) points out that governments prefer small firms to offer formal training, as it is easier to monitor and leads to qualifications which are more widely recognized and therefore “tradable currency”. However, available training packages are considered largely irrelevant to the specific needs of the company and the value of accredited programmes, unless they are required as “a licence to practice” (Chi, Wu and Lin, 2008; Johnson and Devins, 2008; Malik and Nilakant, 2011).

16 The study was part of an EU-funded study in the United Kingdom, and used a telephone survey of 1,000 employees in the manufacturing and services sector and 759 follow-up interviews. SMEs were defined as having up to 500 employees (in accordance with the European Commission). Relatively formalized training practices were indicated by the existence of Investors in People status.

In addition, SMEs are qualitatively different from larger firms in the important respect that they are unable to develop internal labour markets and therefore suffer from disincentives to provide formal training because of the fear of losing employees to other companies (Johnson and Devins, 2008; Kotey and Folker, 2007). Although some authors argue that the loss of an employee following investment can create considerable problems, particularly for smaller employers (e.g. Storey, 1999* and 2004; Storey and Westhead, 1997), other studies (e.g. Devins and Johnson, 2002; Devins, Johnson and Sutherland, 2004; Jones et al., 2013; Kitching and Blackburn, 2002) do not indicate this to be a major issue. For instance, Kitching and Blackburn (2002) state that only 2 per cent of employers reported the risk of trained employees being “poached” or leaving the company as a main argument against offering training. As they argue, this is due to the fact that the majority of training needs in SMEs are very specialized. For example, the need to convey company-specific values is of limited relevance to other firms. The extent to which training makes employees more attractive to other employers is, therefore, highly dependent on the training approach, type and content. However, even in the case of apprenticeship training in Germany, which provides measurable and transferable skills that are comparable across firms and leads to an accredited qualification, Mohrenweiser, Zwick and Backes-Gellner (2013) found that poaching was not a significant issue.

According to Storey (2004), small firms are considerably less likely to offer formal training to their managers and employees for two main reasons: the “ignorance” and the “market” explanation. The ignorance argument is based on the assumption that owner/managers underestimate the benefits of offering training to managers and other employees, and the market case relates to informed decisions by the small enterprise owner that the disadvantages outweigh the benefits. This argument builds on an earlier publication on management training in small firms by Storey and Westhead (1997) and is supported by Matley (2004).

As stated in Section 4.5.1, research has found that formal training measures rise as firms increase in size. Kotey and Folker (2007) also highlight the importance of the growth orientation of a firm. They explain that, after their initial growth phase, firms may be able to adopt a longer-term approach as they develop internal labour markets and their markets become more stable. The limits of informality now become overstretched (see also Roberts, Sawbridge and Bamber, 1992) and formal, future and development-oriented employee training becomes more relevant to the firm. In addition, the benefits of formal training provision begin to outweigh the invested time and costs. Furthermore, at this growth stage, the firm enters a different level of competition which requires them to invest in human capital to improve its competitiveness and foster staff development within the company (see also Johnson, Watson and Webb, 2006; Johnson and Devins, 2008; Malik and Nilakant, 2011). Moreover, Malik and Nilakant (2011) emphasize the importance of extending “size matters” by also paying attention to differences in growth processes between industries.

According to Skinner, Pownall and Cross (2003) and Webster, Walker and Brown (2005), micro enterprises face additional barriers to formalized training due to their limited resources, restricted time, and limited availability and relevance of training packages. However, Kotey and Folker’s findings (2007) support previous research that has shown that family SMEs are able to remain in business for longer periods than non-family firms (Littunen and Hyrsky, 2000). They suggest that family firms may have the “additional resource of family skills and involvement, enabling them to achieve similar levels of effectiveness with less formalized training” (p. 233). Despite the very limited availability of literature on this issue in developing world contexts, it can be assumed that these findings are of particular relevance to the high proportion of micro and small firms, often in the form of family and household businesses. As discussed in Section 4.3 on wages, in these firms income often barely provides minimum living standards, requiring those involved to make efficient use of the scarce resources at hand.

4.5.4 Summary of the nature, availability and outcomes of training in SMEs

The level of impact of training provision is highly dependent on the formal/informal approach to training, type of training methods included in the research and the staff group targeted, as well as factors such as the growth orientation of the firm, the sector it is operating in and the institutional training

background in the particular country. Although it is frequently stated that larger firms are more likely to provide training than small firms, these findings are only related to formal training methods. Research has shown that the majority of small firms do provide some form of staff training, if informal learning and training measures are also considered.

There is some evidence for a link between both formal and informal training and positive outcomes at enterprise-level in SMEs. Many studies have been unable to provide persuasive and methodologically sound evidence of training leading to improved enterprise performance such as increased productivity. A large number of studies have acknowledged the importance of taking into account further mediating factors which can influence performance results, although this complexity adds to the methodological challenges involved. Those studies which have been most persuasive in showing positive outcomes have examined training in the context of a “bundle” of HR practices and the long-term effects of training.

Whereas some studies indicate that formal training measures tailored to the specific needs of the enterprise are more likely to have positive outcomes than informal training, other findings suggest the opposite, arguing that informal training is most strongly related to positive performance. In any case, research has shown that small firms *prefer* informal training methods, as they are congruent with their focus on short-term outcomes, low cost and guaranteed immediate returns, as well as the need to adapt to the rapidly changing environment of their markets.

Several policy implications can be derived from these insights. The finding that owner/managers of small firms view informal training as better suited to meet their needs explains why their interest in government-funded or subsidized formal training programmes is often only modest. Policy-makers need to gain a better understanding of the drivers of training in SMEs and their need to adapt to their rapidly changing environments. However, as Johnson and Devins (2008) argue, it is neither possible nor helpful to invent a “one size fits all” policy approach to foster training in SMEs, given the diversity of these firms and of the contexts in which they are embedded.

We also note that a more systematic recognition or validation of informal learning and training may be in the interest of small business owners, but may not always facilitate employees’ opportunities for development and career progression. There is, therefore, a need to integrate research at the organizational level with analysis at the individual level (see e.g. Devins and Johnson, 2003; Devins, Johnson and Sutherland 2004).

There is also a need for future in-depth research on how different training approaches, types of training methods and their design, and the type of staff trained influences the outcomes. Given the focus on short-term outcomes in most studies as in the other areas reviewed, there is a need to apply longitudinal approaches to clarify the long-term effects of both formal and informal training provision, to obtain more rigorous results on whether a causal link between training and performance exists, what mediating factors are involved, and whether positive short-term outcomes persist over longer periods of time. Furthermore, our knowledge on the use of specific training methods and their outcomes in SMEs in the developing world is extremely limited, highlighting the need for future research in these contexts.

5. Conclusion

Concluding their critical assessment of the state of research on HR practices and enterprise performance over a decade ago, Wright and Gardner (2000*) judged that some real progress had been made and that it seemed acceptable to argue that some practices had been sufficiently solidly linked to performance to suggest that they should be advocated to practitioners. However, they added that much remained to be done if the mechanisms involved were to be properly grasped. Their assessment appears as relevant now as it was then. With the exception of HR bundles, the majority of research on the impact of the practices examined on enterprise-level outcomes indicates positive relationships without conclusively demonstrating robust links across a range of cases.

- Bundles of HR practice provide the most convincing results providing support for social equity theory: the weight of evidence strongly suggests that combinations of practices are associated with positive outcomes related to productivity, innovation, staff retention and customer satisfaction. Some studies which focus on HPWSs offer particularly persuasive evidence of their effectiveness and the existence of a causal link between practices and outcomes.
- Although research has shown the relevance of bundles and HPWSs for SMEs, their applicability on a global scale is likely to be rather limited, as they require a high level of internal consistency and strategic management. Given the mostly informal approaches to labour management in small firms, HPWSs in particular are not applicable to micro firms and a large share of smaller organizations, and thus the majority of developing country enterprises (which are mainly micro and small family firms).
- Much of the research on SMEs that links to outcomes is concerned with medium-sized companies whose internal dynamics are more similar to those in larger organizations. Many of the bundles of practice identified by researchers as effective involve independent, non-company-driven voice mechanisms, but these findings clearly relate to medium-sized rather than small and micro companies, even in the developed world.
- Research that investigates individual practices singly shows more ambiguous results. There is some evidence of associations between practices and outcomes, but most of the work does not establish a strong causal relationship: the direction of causation is often unclear and findings frequently hint at the complexity of the relationship and the role of mediating factors.
- There has been an increasing research focus on OSH in SMEs over the last decade, which provides some evidence of good OSH provision being associated with positive enterprise outcomes. Many studies focus on practices, tools and techniques which treat OSH as an essential aspect of good business practice and quality management.
- Similarly, there is some evidence of training, better working hours and wages being associated with positive outcomes, mostly in the form of increased productivity, although there are fine nuances in relation to the conditions under which these outcomes materialize.
- Some longitudinal work and a small amount of case study research – the latter necessarily limited in scope – does appear to show that the practices generate the outcomes. Some research also shows that positive effects become stronger or only become apparent over time, but these studies are scarce. Given the general focus on short-term outcomes in SMEs, such findings are of limited interest to small business owners.
- The heterogeneity of the SME sector further complicates the research problem. Research needs to take into account the differential resources and capabilities and owner/manager motivations, as well as the varied nature of markets and associated regulatory/institutional contexts. However, these influences are widely under-addressed in the body of research reviewed.

- OSH provides a significant example of the importance of the wider context. Another is provided by the large variety in minimum wage regulation between different sectors and across countries. Some research suggests that, whereas minimum wages lead to increased income and improved working conditions for some workers, they can also cause negative employment effects where other workers are forced into employment at a lower wage in the informal economy or unemployment. However, the weight of evidence is that these employment effects are often tiny.
- The considerable practical difficulties involved in researching small companies was very evident in the research; problems of access and of sustaining research in small enterprises with the strong pressures they often face and their very high failure rates in both the developed and the developing world also came through. Yet small companies clearly face very specific problems internationally. There is very little research on small and micro enterprises and only some of it is survey work.
- Very little robust work exists attempting to refute the suggested links between decent work practices and positive enterprise-level outcomes. An exception is the work on minimum wages mentioned above, part of a long-running and fierce debate that occasionally includes enterprise-level effects but mainly focuses on national employment effects. Only a small amount of this research takes costs into account, but that which does shows either no or positive effects on outcomes.
- Reasons for non-adoption of progressive HR practices by SMEs in the developed world are stated in very general terms, as linked to employee perceptions, operational and management issues. These require more precise specification. In the developing world they appear to arise from national systemic as well as company-related factors (e.g. skilled labour supply issues and a widespread lack of HRM and HR development activities within SMEs).
- State intervention and multi-stakeholder regulation are accepted as important in playing a significant positive role. One example of sustained state intervention, the French JEI, appears to have improved earnings, employment and productivity in the specific context of very small firms operating in information and communication services. Multiple stakeholder and other innovative forms of regulation have also been widely identified in the OSH literature as offering important possibilities for improving performance. Where state regulatory capacities are weak, as in parts of the developing world, these may be supplemented by private stakeholders with positive results for enterprise performance.
- The action research “dual agenda” approach developed by Lewis and Cooper (2005) and their colleagues has piloted an effective process by which progress has been made in improving gender equity (including FWAs). In its educational aspect it is analogous to some of the more innovative approaches used to improve OSH in smaller companies. Although the Lewis and Cooper approach has been most widely used in larger companies, it may be extendable to SMEs and is potentially even especially relevant in small and micro companies where formalized HR systems are underdeveloped or absent. It is, however, resource-intensive.
- There is little work on the link between the subjects reviewed and enterprise-level outcomes carried out in SMEs in the developing world; there is also little that includes a gender dimension.
- A clear need exists for more longitudinal and multi-level work, allowing for causation to be better assessed. There is also a need for “thickly-described” case studies that take a process approach; these should aim to show the social dynamics involved in the proposed link between improving working conditions and positive outcomes at enterprise level.

ANNEX

Further detailed research reviews: An alphabetical list

Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
1. Akehurst, G.; Comeche, J. M.; Galindo, M. A. 2009.	“Job satisfaction and commitment in the entrepreneurial SME”, in <i>Small Business Economics</i> , Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 277–89.	None	The work is unique in that it argues for the roles of teams, groups and collective effort in enhancing competitiveness and innovation. It questions the significance of “job satisfaction” and “commitment” in encouraging the growth and continuance of these teams/groups/collective efforts. Internal entrepreneurship can enhance competitiveness and innovation.	Face-to-face interviews, over a three-month period, of owners and collaborative team members of Spanish firms. Opinions from 114 firms and 228 members of managing teams of these firms gathered. Pre-tested interview instrument.
2. Altinay, L.; Altinay, E; Gannon, J. 2008.	“Exploring the relationship between the human resource management practices and growth in small service firms”, in <i>The Service Industries Journal</i> , Vol. 28, No. 7, pp. 919–937.	None	Examines HRM practices and growth, positively relating employee training, empowerment and formal recruitment to business growth.	Uses sales growth as a measurement.
3. Amodu, T. 2008.	<i>The determinants of compliance with laws and regulations with special reference to health and safety: A literature review</i> , Health and Safety Executive Research Report 638 (Norwich).	None, despite some mention of engendering “compliance cultures”.	Reviews literature on businesses’ compliance with OSH regulations, the behavioural complexities involved and the implications for policy design and enforcement strategy.	Literature review.
4. Aragon-Sanchez, A.; Barba-Aragon, I.; Sanz-Valle, R. 2003.	“Effects of training on business results”, in <i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> , Vol. 14, No. 6, pp. 956–980.	None	Examines the link between training and effectiveness as well as profitability in SMEs. Discovers some support for both, especially effectiveness.	Researches training, covering methods, characteristics, activities and efforts in training. Empirical model estimated using regression.

Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
5. Aragon-Sanchez, A.; Sanchez-Marin, G. 2005.	“Strategic orientation, management characteristics, and performance: A study of Spanish SMEs”, in <i>Journal of Small Business Management</i> , Vol. 43, No. 3, pp. 287–308.	None	Provides empirical evidence on the multi-faceted relationship between strategic orientation, management of internal factors (including human resources) and implications for enterprise-level performance. Finds that SMEs that have a strategic <i>prospector</i> orientation are the ones that best take advantage of their internal resources and capabilities, leading ultimately to increased capability.	Analysis of Spanish survey data, variance analysis, means comparison, multiple regression analysis.
6. Arocena, P.; Núñez, I. 2010.	“An empirical analysis of the effectiveness of occupational health and safety management systems in SMEs”, in <i>International Small Business Journal</i> , Vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 398–419.	None	Examines OSH management through a survey of 193 Spanish manufacturing SMEs, focusing on differences between the OSH activity of small-sized enterprises (SSEs) – those under 50 employees – and medium sized enterprises (MSEs) – 50–250 employees. No direct link made to firm-level outcomes other than through need for better accident prevention through improved OSH systems.	Sample of manufacturing SMEs established in Navarre. Data on OSH activities obtained through a survey of a population of 325 manufacturers with between 30 and 250 employees.
7. Backett-Milburn, K.; Airey, L.; McKie, L.; Hogg, G. 2008.	“Family comes first or open all hours? How low paid women working in food retailing manage webs of obligation at home and work”, in <i>Sociological Review</i> , Vol. 56, No. 3, pp. 474–493.	Gender-central	Focuses on women workers and business owners/employers in Scottish retail food SMEs, exploring the mutually transformative links between informal workplace flexibility and support and the enterprise-level outcomes of flexibility, that is, the ability to staff businesses in a context where turnover is usually high. Transcends the often stated benefits of mutual flexibility to explore, in depth, processes of negotiation, compromise and identity management underlying	An in-depth qualitative approach is used, including survey data. Semi-structured interviews used to explore the experiences of 55 female employees in nine businesses. They include two large businesses, three medium-sized, two small and two micro businesses. A further 12 interviews with employers to investigate views on work–life balance policies and practices and with five representatives of trade unions and other organizations.

Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
			<p>the “business case” with a vulnerable but understudied population. SMEs in the retail food sector rely on low-paid workers, mostly women working part-time, who manage webs of obligation in child care and other forms of caring across the life course as well as often inconvenient working hours. Employers interviewed see the value of supporting women with flexibility and talk about accepting that family will have to come first and that sometimes it will be necessary to change shifts or do without a member of staff. Employers also argue that knowing their staff and their personal obligations and ensuring an ethos of flexibility makes for a more satisfied and sustainable workforce.</p>	
8. Baldock, R.; James, P.; Smallbone, D.; Vickers, I. 2006.	<p>“Influences on small firm compliance related behaviour: The case of workplace health and safety”, in <i>Environment Policy, Planning C: Government Policy</i>, Vol. 24, No. 6, pp. 827–846.</p>	<p>12% of enterprises surveyed were solely managed by women and a further 6% co-owned.</p>	<p>Examines diverse responses of small and micro enterprises in different sectors/ethnic groups, making links to differential performance, enterprise-level learning and innovation, influence of gender, and also scope for policy innovation in OSH support and channels of influence.</p>	<p>Telephone survey, face-to-face interviews.</p>
9. Bauer, T.K. 2004.	<p><i>High performance workplace practices and job satisfaction: Evidence from Europe</i>, IZA Discussion Paper No. 1265, (Bonn).</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>Analyses the impact of high performance workplace organizations (HPWOs) on workers’ job satisfaction. The estimate results show that a higher involvement of workers in HPWOs is associated with higher job satisfaction.</p>	<p>Several HPWO indices (including a work system index; a skills index; an incentive index and an overall HPWO scale, defined as the sum of the aforementioned indices). Data derived from the European Survey on Working Conditions is also used.</p>

Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
10.	Bhattacharya, S.; Tang, L. 2013.	None	Focuses on employee participation and management commitment to OSH in the shipping industry – noted as an area of “major concern”. Investigates the impact of senior officer leadership on ratings’ participation in OSH management. Results suggest that while ratings’ precarious employment coupled with a steep hierarchy of command on board ships make upward communication in formal environments practically impossible, it is possible for senior officers to elicit effective participation from ratings by making good use of informal settings, working alongside ratings and engaging with them in social activities.	Observation, qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews.
11.	Bradley, L.M.; Royer, S.; Eckardt, F. 2008.	Marginal	Makes a theoretical argument for a link between work–life balance, supportive organizational culture and firms’ competitive advantage via organizational commitment and enterprise-specific human resources. Applies an economic perspective to work–life balance.	Theory.
12.	Brooks, B. 2008.	None	Highlights the importance of cultural assumptions “embedded” within the enterprise and, particularly, draws attention to the role of “safety culture” with respect to the ways in which small businesses respond to occupational risk.	Uses ethnographic research methods to examine the organizational culture of a small furniture-manufacturing firm in Australia.

Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
13. Cagno, E.; Micheli, G.; Micheli, J. L.; Perotti, S. 2011.	"Identification of OHS-related factors and interactions among those and OHS performance in SMEs", in <i>Safety Science</i> , Vol. 49, No. 2, pp. 216–225.	Yes	Seeks to identify a pragmatic approach to OSH improvement which does not also undermine business performance. Identifies factors and interactions that impact on OSH performance which SMEs can realistically modify, drawing on a literature review supported by practitioners' suggestions and two data sources, i.e. from INAIL and a survey of metalworking SMEs. The authors argue that the resulting model enables entrepreneurs and managers to better plan interventions for the improvement of OSH performance.	Draws on findings from The E-Merging Project. Identifies empirically proven company OSH-related factors and interactions in literature, panel review by 12 OSH experts/managers.
14. Carlson, D. S.; Upton, N.; Seaman, S. 2006.	"The impact of human resource practices and compensation design on performance: An analysis of family-owned SMEs", in <i>Journal of Small Business Management</i> , Vol. 44, No. 4, pp. 531–543.	None	Examines the impact of HR practices and compensation design on performance.	Measures performance through sales growth, then estimates logic models on probability of high or low sales.
15. Cassell, C.; Nadin, S.; Gray, M.; Clegg, C. 2002.	"Exploring human resource management practices in small and medium sized enterprises", in <i>Personnel Review</i> , Vol. 31, No. 6, pp. 671–692.	None	Focuses on HR practices in SMEs and what motivates their implementation. Overall findings are compatible with those of previous studies, i.e. SMEs have an overall more ad hoc approach to various HR practices than in large organizations, characterized by the authors as more of a "pick and mix" contingency rather than strategic approach.	Telephone survey and in-depth face-to-face interviews.
16. Castellanos, R.; Martin, M. 2011.	"Training as a source of competitive advantage: Performance impact and the role of firm strategy, the Spanish case", in <i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> , Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 574–594.	None	Investigates how a company's competitive strategy affects its training practices.	Insufficiently described.

	Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
17.	Cegarra-Leiva, D.; Sanchez-Vidal, E.; Cegarra-Navarro, J. 2012.	“Understanding the link between work life balance practices and organisational outcomes in SMEs: The mediating effect of a supportive culture”, in <i>Personnel Review</i> , Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 359–379.	Yes	Explores theoretical explanations for the effect of HRM systems on enterprise outcomes, with particular attention to work–life balance.	Quantitative methodology, a survey sample of 263 firms.
18.	Cetinel, F.; Yolal, M.; Emeksiz, M. 2008.	“HRM in small and medium sized hotels in Turkey”, in <i>Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism</i> , Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 43–63.	Marginal	Describes the HRM practices in SME hotels in Turkey. Finds that most practices are informal. There is no attempt to systematically relate practices to enterprise-level outcomes. The authors do not themselves prove a link between HRM practices and business performance: they assume this link. Formal processes were not viewed by respondents as a positive development and informality was still regarded as the most appropriate approach to effective working relationships in the small business environment.	Primarily questionnaires, modelled on earlier instruments used by Thomas et al. (1998), Page, Forer and Lawton (1999) and Yolal (2003) with the questions adapted to the conditions of SME hotels in Turkey.
19.	Champoux, D.; Brun, J-P. 2003.	“Occupational health and safety management in small size enterprises: an overview of the situation and avenues for intervention and research”, in <i>Safety Science</i> , Vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 301–318.	None	Examines OSH management practices in small firms with fewer than 50 employees, drawing on telephone survey evidence to explore the difficulties they experience and avenues for intervention. Finds that almost two-thirds of respondents considered the employees themselves to be the main cause of their accidents.	Telephone interviews, statistical analysis.

Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
20. Choi, B. C. K. 2005.	“An international comparison of women’s occupational health issues in the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Canada, Hong Kong and Singapore: The CIDA–SEAGEP Study”, in <i>Occupational Medicine</i> , Vol. 55, No. 7, pp. 515–522.	Very pertinent	Examines women’s occupational health issues (risk factors, social determinants, challenges) in South-East Asia and Canadian national contexts. Presents a subset of findings of a study on women’s health funded by the Canadian International Development Agency’s Southeast Asia Gender Equity Program (CIDA–SEAGEP).	Interviews with high-ranking government officials and senior researchers.
21. Debrah, Y.; Mmieh, F. 2009.	“Employment relations in SMEs: Insights from Ghana”, in <i>International Journal of HRM</i> , Vol. 20, No. 7, pp. 1554–1575.	None	The main argument is that one should not continue to think that SME = informal HR, but that there is evidence that SMEs formalize their HR practices (moving away from informal, ad hoc, particularistic and paternalistic systems) in order to be competitive, so the link between HR practices and competitiveness is assumed. The authors argue that the most prominent influence on employment relations in the firms interviewed was competition (others being regulation, economic and labour market conditions, lack of enforcement of labour legislation). This competition shapes the kinds of HR practices they adopt and is a critical factor in the decision to formalize HR practices.	Three case studies of SMEs in the three largest cities in Ghana; relies on a series of interviews with owners, managers and employees (92 interviewed in total).
22. De Kok, J.; den Hartog, D. 2006a.	<i>High performance work systems, performance and innovativeness in small firms</i> , EIM Working Paper series, WP N200520 (Zoetermeer).	None	Studies the effects of high performance work systems (combined effects of sets of HR practices) on enterprise performance, focusing on the link between HPWSs and SMEs as opposed to effects in large firms.	Survey, telephone interviews.

Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
23. Dorman, P. 2000.	<i>The economics of safety, health, and well-being at work: An overview</i> (Geneva, ILO).	Briefly mentioned in relation to precarious employment but also in identifying how little existing research is specific to OSH.	Examines issues of health and safety, and well-being, through the disciplinary lens of economics; argues that economics offers an important perspective on the subject.	Draws on selected contributions/ empirical sources.
24. Eakin, J. M. 2010.	"Towards a 'standpoint' perspective: Health and safety in small workplaces from the perspective of the workers", in <i>Policy and Practice in Health and Safety</i> , Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 113–127.	None	Claims that in order to understand and improve the effectiveness of OSH policy implementation and change, one should gain knowledge from worker standpoints which may be very different to those of their managers. Finds that incidences of employee injury or illness, if not dealt with correctly, may accentuate workers' distinction between their own interests and those of their employer (and the firm itself) and this may lead to strained labour relations due to workers resenting not being treated with dignity and respect as human beings.	Reevaluates past case studies with the aim of obtaining worker perspectives on health and safety issues.
25. Elsler, D.; Treutlein, D.; Rydlewska, I.; Frusteri, L.; Krüger, H.; Veerman, T.; Eeckelaert, L.; Roskams, N.; Van Den Broek, K.; Taylor, T.N. 2010.	"A review of case studies evaluating economic incentives to promote occupational safety and health", in <i>Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health</i> , Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 289–298.	None	Examines 14 OSH incentive schemes. The authors conclude that there is a need for better standards for reporting and evaluating incentive schemes in order to enable policy-makers to make well-informed decisions on public investments in OSH.	A cost-benefit analysis of three case studies.

Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
26. Fabi, B.; Raymond, L.; Lacoursiere, R. 2007.	"HRM practice clusters in relation to size and performance: An empirical investigation in Canadian manufacturing SMEs", in <i>Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship</i> , Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 25–40.	None	Studies the choice/existence of HRM practices (or bundles) and their links to enterprise performance. The argument is made that SMEs make less use of the HRM practices and with lower sophistication. A positive relationship between HRM and performance in SMEs is found.	Sample of 176 SMEs, descriptive statistics, non-parametric test, factor (principal component) analysis.
27. FitzRoy, F. R.; Kraft, K. 1987.	"Formen der Arbeitnehmer- und Arbeitgeberkooperation und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Unternehmensleistung und Entlohnung", in F.R. FitzRoy and K. Kraft (eds): <i>Mitarbeiterbeteiligung und Mitbestimmung im Unternehmen</i> (Berlin and New York, Walter de Gruyter), pp. 173–94.	None	Assesses the productivity effects of the unique German institution of parity, board-level codetermination. Suggests a significant, albeit small, positive influence on productivity from the 1976 strengthening of the codetermination law. As such, these results reject the critique of c-determination made by some business and academic observers.	Published panel data for 179 public firms in (former) West Germany, 1972–76 and 1981–85, allowing for adjustment to the 1976 law.
28. Gerlach, I.; Schneider, H.; Juncke, D. 2007.	<i>Betriebliche Familienpolitik in auditierten Unternehmen und Institutionen</i> , Arbeitspapier Nr.3, Forschungszentrum Familienbewusste Personalpolitik, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, Germany.	Yes	Considers family policies pursued by enterprises as well as operational effects of family-friendly policies. The results show that family-friendliness leads to positive operational effects in both types of organization. However, a comparison between both types shows that family-friendliness is more effective in for-profit than in non-profit companies.	Data drawn from a pool of organizations audited by the charity Beruf und Familie GmbH. Analyses were performed separately for not-for-profit and for-profit organizations.
29. Golhar, D.; Deshpande, S. 1997.	"HRM practices of large and small Canadian manufacturing firms", in <i>Journal of Small Business Management</i> , Vol. 35, No. 3, pp. 30–8.	None	Examines differences in labour force characteristics between large and small firms; addresses the issue of the role of HRM comparing large and small Canadian firms. Main findings are that small firms need to make extra effort to staff and/or train employees in small firms, which are generally characterized by lower wages compared to large firms.	Survey data collection.

	Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
30.	Grigore, A. 2008.	<i>The impact of human resources practices upon small companies' performance</i> (Bucharest, Hyperion University).	None	Argues for use of HRM and high performance work systems (HPWS) in small companies in Romania by review of current literature. Concludes that HRM can influence productivity which in turn can influence profitability and innovation.	Review of previous research.
31.	Haefeli, K.; Haslam, C.; Haslam, R. 2005.	<i>Perceptions of the cost implications of health and safety failures</i> , Health and Safety Executive Research Report 403 (Norwich).	None	Explores perceptions of costs incurred due to health and safety failures within organizations of varying size and sector.	Focus groups and interviews.
32.	Haslam, C.; Haefeli, K.; Haslam, R. 2010.	"Perceptions of occupational injury and illness costs by size of organization", in <i>Occupational Medicine</i> , Vol. 60, No. 6, pp. 484–490.	None	Focuses on perceptions of illness and injury costs in SMEs and large organizations. Finds investments in health and safety to be driven by a range of factors. Concludes that agencies need to adopt a wider approach to build on the range of factors motivating organizational commitment to H&S (i.e. not just financial cost), including provision of information on the 'human impact' of injury and illness.	Draws on a study funded by the UK HSE.
33.	Hasle, P.; Kines, P.; Andersen, L .P. 2009.	"Small enterprise owners accident causation attribution and prevention", in <i>Safety Science</i> , Vol. 47, No. 1, pp. 9–19.	None	Explores how owners of small enterprises attribute accident causation and what they learn about prevention after an accident. Concludes that efforts to improve accident prevention need to find ways to avoid defensive attribution in small enterprises, i.e. by introducing a positive-learning cycle.	Interviews, thematic analysis.

	Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
34.	Hasle, P.; Limborg, H. J. 2006.	"A review of the literature on preventive occupational health and safety activities in small enterprises", in <i>Industrial Health</i> , Vol. 44, No. 1, pp. 6–12.	None	Identifies that, despite lack of evaluation of intervention studies, there is sufficiently strong evidence to conclude that employees of small firms are subject to higher risks than employees in larger firms.	Literature review.
35.	Hayton, J. C. 2003.	"Strategic human capital management in SMEs: An empirical study of entrepreneurial performance", in <i>Human Resource Management</i> , Vol. 42, No. 4, pp. 375–391.	None	Examines the link between strategic human capital management and entrepreneurship. Researches employee participation programmes and encourages extra-role behaviour to promote innovation and entrepreneurship.	Entrepreneurship measured using Miller's (1983) instrument. Regression analysis used.
36.	Hoque, K.; Bacon, N. 2006.	"The antecedents of training activity in British small and medium-sized enterprises", in <i>Work, Employment and Society</i> , Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 531–552.	None	Studies the antecedents of training in SMEs. Points out that both managers and non-managers receive less training in SMEs than in larger organizations, and that training in the SME sector is associated with larger SMEs, multi-site SMEs, franchises, the presence of a personnel/HR specialist and multiple memberships of business advisory networks.	Comparative methodology and quantitative techniques.
37.	Jensen, P. L.; Laustsen, S.; Jensen, E. 2010.	"Development of the relationship between small building contractors and developers in order to meet OSH requirements", in <i>Policy and Practice in Health and Safety</i> , Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 37–55.	None	Focuses on the question of how some public developers in Denmark's construction industry formulate OSH requirements in the tendering process and how this can put small bidding contractors at a disadvantage. Finds that small contractors actually value developers' prioritization of OSH and their assistance in ensuring that they comply with regulations and procedures. Also concludes that both contractors and developers favour a proactive approach	Case studies, structured interviews.

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				in order to create better and safer construction sites, and that developers are generally willing to assist contractors in the preparation of relevant documents and also in developing good OSH practice.	
38	Johnson, N. B.; Anderson, J. R. 2004.	"Airline employment, productivity and working conditions following deregulation", in <i>Research in Transportation Economics</i> , Vol. 10, pp. 79–108.	None	Working conditions and productivity in the US airline industry. Since deregulation, working conditions have worsened but productivity has increased, but largely due to competitive pressures.	Descriptive data – basic.
39	King-Kauanui, S.; Ngoc, S. D.; Ashley-Cotleur, C. 2006.	"Impact of human resource management: SME performance in Vietnam", in <i>Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship</i> , Vol.11, No. 1, pp. 79–95.	None	Shows a relationship between HRM practices, i.e. training, appraisal systems and incentive pay, with performance in SMEs in Vietnam. Argues that this shows that these HRM practices can be transferred between cultures with similar outcomes.	Uses interview instruments, "perceptual measures" developed by Gupta and Govindarajan (1984).
40	Kirsten, W. 2008.	"Health and productivity management in Europe", in <i>International Journal of Workplace Health Management</i> , Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 136–144.	Not available	Investigates work performance and workplace health management; finds a very strong positive relationship between the two, i.e. looking after health leads to better performance.	Review of existing evidence.
41	Knudsen, F.; Gron, S. 2010.	"Making sense of fishermen's risk perception", in <i>Policy and Practice in Health and Safety</i> , Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 78–94.	Yes, but all crew male.	Examines why fishermen are prepared to accept being exposed to enormous risks when at sea (their workplace) as part of their job and in doing so either overlook or underplay the health and safety issues that face them. Finds that fishermen adopt coping strategies to deal with the huge objective risks that they face. Concludes that any improvements to workplace safety	Ethnographic study and a review of ten years of secondary sources. Field notes, diaries, photo/video documentation and narrative records.

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42	Kongtip, P.; Yoosook, W.; Chantanakul, S. 2008.	None	undertaken with extreme sensitivity because the fisher community is suspicious of outsiders, in particular those from outside being seen to impose regulations upon them and their work practices. Argues that SMEs in Thailand have better health and safety management than expected. Looks at several OSH areas in the SMEs: welfare facilities, health management, fire prevention, electrical safety management, exposure to hazardous working environment, control of industrial hazards, OSH management and training (observance of these areas was very impressive, in very many cases exceeding 65%).	Factory visits, a large-scale questionnaire.
43	"The effects of employee satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviour, and turnover on organizational effectiveness: A unit-level, longitudinal study", in <i>Personnel Psychology</i> , Vol. 54, No. 1, pp. 101–114.	None	Addresses the issue of whether positive employee attitudes and behaviours influence business outcomes, or whether positive business outcomes influence positive employee attitudes and behaviours. The results demonstrate that HR outcomes influence business outcomes, rather than the other way round, in units of a regional restaurant chain.	Data drawn from 28 units of a regional restaurant chain over a two-year period, results from employee surveys, manager surveys, customer surveys and organizational records.
44	<i>Is there a link between workplace health and safety and firm performance and productivity?</i> , paper presented at the Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand (AIRAANZ), 2007.	None	Aims to critique extant international and New Zealand research, with a focus on contributions from ergonomics and occupational medicine/health promotion. Identifies some studies that provide evidence that a healthy and safe working environment has the potential to increase labour productivity and, in turn, increase business profits.	Critical literature review.

Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
45. Lancaster, R.; Ward, R.; Talbot, P.; Brazier, A. 2003.	<i>Costs of compliance with health and safety regulations in SMEs</i> , Health and Safety Executive Research Report 174 (Norwich).	None	Investigates the concern that smaller firms are often at a competitive disadvantage compared with larger organizations due to cost and time involved in regulatory compliance. Large organizations (more than 5,000 employees) reported considerably less expenditure per employee for all regulations compared with organizations of fewer than 5000 employees.	Postal survey, interviews.
46. Legg, S.; Battisti, M.; Harris, L. A.; Laird, I.; Lamm, F.; Massey, C.; Olsen, K. 2009.	<i>Occupational health and safety in small business</i> (Wellington, New Zealand, NOHSAC).	A brief mention	An overview of OSH in small firms to inform policy in New Zealand. Recommends that successful OSH programme/intervention for small businesses should focus on a particular sector or risk, be uncomplicated, and measure its adequacy by assessing the needs before the action and by carrying out a systematic evaluation of its effects afterwards.	Analysis of existing data, case studies, review of international practice.
47. Legg, S.; Olsen, K.; Lamm, F.; Laird, I.; Harris, L.A.; Hasle, P. 2010.	"Understanding the programme theories underlying national strategies to improve the working environment in small businesses", in <i>Policy and Practice in Health and Safety</i> , Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 5–35.	None	Uses "evaluation theory" framework (concerned with change) and "programme theory" – technique to explore the fundamental rationale and driver(s) underlying what makes OSH programmes targeted at small firms work.	Theoretical framework based on evaluation/programme theory, use of publicly available data.
48. Locke, R.; Kochan, T.; Romis, M.; Qin, F. 2007. Locke, R.; Romis, M. 2010.	"Beyond corporate codes of conduct: Work organization and labour standards at Nike's suppliers", in <i>International Labour Review</i> , Vol. 146, Nos. 1–2, pp. 21–40. A fuller version of the case study appears in: "The promise and	None	Shows that even under the same political and economic contexts (including national regulation and corporate code of conduct), management practices and the ways in which work is organized make a difference to enterprise-level outcomes. The central argument in both articles i	Qualitative and quantitative analysis of Nike's supply base based on data from their management audit (M-audit) and Compliance Rating Programme related to the corporate code of conduct, both of which were generated internally by Nike staff.

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	perils of private voluntary regulation: Labor standards and work organization in two Mexican garment factories”, in <i>Review of International Political Economy</i> , Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 45–74.		s that beyond debates about the usefulness of codes of conduct and various efforts at monitoring for compliance in improving labour standards, how work is organized and the extent to which labour on the shop floor is empowered lead to significant and sustained improvements in working conditions (consequently, greater employee satisfaction) and better business performance.	
49.	Maciel, R. H.; Santos, J. B. F.; Matos, T. G. R.; Meireles, G. F.; Vieira, M. E. A.; Fontenelle, M. F. 2010.	None	Details the health impacts of street scavenging on informally employed workers in the recycled refuse sector (in Fortaleza, Brazil), focusing more specifically on how these workers understand their own subjectivities and reconstruct their work identities in order to improve their own sense of dignity as a coping strategy to deal with their poor working conditions, the serious health risks they are exposed to, sense of marginalization and meagre incomes. Concludes that despite the atrocious working conditions and degrees of exploitation experienced among both workers who belong to an association (or cooperative) and those who work alone for private scrapyards, those in the latter benefit from a greater sense of collective identity and inclusion as well as minor improvements in their actual working conditions, which they term “symbolic deprecarization”.	Interviews, focus groups and an ethnographic study.

	Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
50.	Massey, C.; Lamm, F.; Perry, M. 2006.	<i>Understanding the link between workplace health and safety and firm performance and productivity.</i> Prepared for New Zealand Department of Labour (Massey University, New Zealand Centre for Small & Medium Enterprise Research)..	None	Finds increasing and persuasive evidence that providing a healthy/safe working environment has potential to increase labour productivity and profits, but important issues relating to how best to evaluate such contributions of OSH measures, and what are negative outcomes; importance of “necessary ingredients” for success, notably a good level of cooperation between management and employees.	Literature review, interviews, case studies.
51.	Masurel, E. 2007.	“Why SMEs invest in environmental measures: Sustainability evidence from small and medium-sized printing firms”, in <i>Business Strategy and the Environment</i> , Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 190–201.	None	Argues that in general SMEs are slow to adopt sustainable (environmental) measures, but there are exceptions that deserve special attention. The main finding is that the improvement of working conditions (demanded by employees) is the main reason why some SMEs invest in environmental measures.	Survey data. Simple descriptive quantitative measures.
52.	Meite, V.; Baeyens, J.; Dewil, R. 2009.	“Towards safety, hygiene and environment in African small and medium companies”, in <i>Journal of Environmental Management</i> , Vol. 90, No. 3, pp. 1463–1468.	None	Surveys safety, hygiene and environmental (SHE) practices in 242 companies across eight West African countries. The authors conclude that “although the recorded results are rather poor, there are obviously many possibilities of improvement, with a little goodwill of the SME managers and supervisors.”	Questionnaires, interviews.
53.	Micheli, G. J. L.; Cagno, E. 2008.	“Perception of safety issues and investments in safety management in small- and medium-sized enterprises:	None	Surveys SMEs as part of phase of development of electronic tools for integrating OSH management and improved business competitiveness in	Survey of 396 engineering SMEs, closed format questions.

Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
	A survey in the Lecco area", in <i>Prevention Today</i> , Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 7–18.		SMEs. Finds "technical compliance, whether in response to external factors (legislation) or internal factors (increase in production capacity and quality standards), has been a consistently pursued objective and continues to benefit from investments".	
54.	Olsen, K.; Leigh-Ann, H.; Laird, I.; Legg, S.; Perry, M.; Hasle, P. 2010. "Differential intervention strategies to improve the management of hazardous chemicals in small enterprises", in <i>Policy and Practice in Health and Safety</i> , Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 57–76.	None	In general, finds that owner/managers of firms possess a poor knowledge of the potential health risks presented by the use of chemicals in the workplace, and also a weak understanding of the legislation regulating the safety conditions of the sectors they work in; also that there are considerable differences between owner/managers' perceived and actual knowledge.	Structured interviews and the application of a conceptual model.
55.	O'Regan, N.; Stainer, L.; Sims, M. 2010. "Training in SMEs and its relationship to profitability", in <i>International Journal of Human Resources Development and Management</i> , Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 166–181.	None	Sets out to investigate the impact of training on performance and profitability in manufacturing SMEs, finding that those which use HR professionals seem to perform better than those who invest in training without HR input.	Investigates manufacturing firms, uses random sampling methodology.
56.	Patel, P.; Melissa, C. 2010. "Adopting HRM practices and their effectiveness in small firms facing product market competition", in <i>Human Resource Management</i> , Vol. 49, No. 20, pp. 265–290.	None	Argues that challenges for developing and maintaining the workforce are most important for small firms and when there is intensive product market competition. The role of group culture is explained in the framework of a "competing values model"; it plays a mediating role for the adoption and effectiveness of HRM.	Product market competition is calculated as Lerner index. HRM is measured by composite index as in Sels et al. (2006).

	Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
57.	Rauch, A.; Frese, M. 2000.	“Effects of human resource strategies on success of small scale businesses: A longitudinal study”, in P.D. Reynolds; E. Autio; C.G. Brush et al. (eds): <i>Frontiers of entrepreneurship research</i> . Proceedings of the 20th Annual Entrepreneurship Research Conference, Wellesley, MS, Babson College.	None	Examines the effect of HR strategies upon success in SMEs in Germany, finding a strong correlation between the extent of HR strategies and success as measured by growth and size of firm.	Factor analysis, hierarchical regression.
58.	Razouk, A. A. 2011.	“High-performance work systems and performance of French small- and medium-sized enterprises: Examining causal order”, in <i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> , Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 311–330.	None	Investigates high performance work systems and performance, measuring HPWS through appraisal, participation, information, compensation and communication. HPWS is positively correlated with both current and future performance.	Factor analysis, regression on performance.
59.	Ridge, M.; Bell, M.; Kossykh, Y.; Woolley, N. 2008.	<i>An empirical analysis of the effect of health on aggregate income and individual labour market outcomes in the UK</i> , Health and Safety Executive (Norwich).	Yes	Examines links between health and economic growth in the UK context with a focus on whether health in general, and ill-health caused by work in particular, has an impact on various measures of economic performance: GDP growth, productivity and employment levels. Also presents some initial estimates linking ill-health to ill-health caused by work.	Econometric analysis. Uses individual-level data from the British Household Panel Survey and survey data from HSE's FIT 3 programme.
60.	Rose, R. C.; Kumar, N. 2006.	“The influence of organisational and human resource management strategies on performance”, in <i>Performance Improvements</i> , Vol. 45, No. 4, pp. 18–23.	None	Argues that there is a link between HRM practices and firm competitive advantage. Demonstrates that there is a significant relationship between the adoption of high-involvement HRM strategies and business performance.	Questionnaires, rating by company HR managers of the companies' performance.

	Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
61.	Sels, L.; De Wimpe, S.; Delmotte, J.; Maes, J.; Faems, D.; Forrier, A. 2006a.	"Linking HRM and small business performance: An examination of the impact of HRM intensity on the productivity and financial performance of small businesses", in <i>Small Business Economics</i> , Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 83–101.	None	Studies the impact of HRM intensity on productivity and profitability of small firms within the framework of human capital theory and bankruptcy prediction model. Provides a literature review on the links between HRM and firm performance, with special attention to SMEs. The findings support strong effects of HRM on productivity and financial performance.	Structural equation modelling.
62.	Shalini, R.T. 2009.	"Economic cost of occupational accidents: Evidence from a small island economy", in <i>Safety Science</i> , Vol. 47, No. 7, pp. 973–979.	A brief mention in the review section.	Seeks to measure the economic costs of occupational accidents in Mauritius, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Concludes that there is a need for greater awareness of practical health and safety systems and procedures among both employees and employers.	Secondary data from public sector sources, interviews with victims, employers and family members.
63.	Sheikh, S.; Gardiner, B.; Brettell, S. 2006.	<i>Health and safety management and business economic performance: An econometric study</i> , RR510 Research Report, prepared by Cambridge Econometrics for the Health and Safety Executive (Norwich).	None	Attempts to gather and assess robust econometric evidence on the relationship between health and safety activity undertaken by firms in a sector and sectoral economic performance in the United Kingdom. Concludes that the impact of H&S activity on productivity is not very strong.	Information drawn from Cambridge Econometrics' comprehensive volume and price databanks of the UK economy, complemented by data from the Annual Business Inquiry, the Labour Force Survey, the Bank of England Industry Dataset and RIDDOR.
64.	Smallman, C. 2001.	"The reality of 'Revitalizing Health and Safety'", in <i>Journal of Safety Research</i> , Vol. 32, pp. 391–439.	A brief mention.	Addresses policy concern to improve OSH regulation and make it more compatible with competitiveness, by drawing on literature to assess the British Government's Revitalizing Health and Safety initiative introduced in March 1999.	Content analysis. A model was developed of the theoretical determinants of OSH performance from the literature; the framework is then used to facilitate policy analysis of the British Government's Revitalizing Health and Safety Strategy Statement.

	Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
65.	Storey, D. J. 1999.	<i>Human resource management policies and practices in SMEs in the UK: Does it really influence their performance</i> , CSME Working Paper 69 (Warwick University Business School).	None	Explores the relationship between HRM practices (specifically education, training and development) and SME economic performance. Concludes that in so far as UK middle-sized firms are concerned, the relationship between HR policies and practice, and firm performance, is weak. However, neither leadership nor strategy exerted a more powerful influence on economic performance.	Telephone survey, multivariate analysis.
66.	Storey, D. J.; Saridakis, G.; Sen-Gupta, S.; Edwards, P. K.; Blackburn, R. 2010.	"Linking HR formality with employee job quality: The role of firm and workplace size", in <i>Human Resource Management</i> , Vol. 49, No. 2, pp. 305–329.	None	Investigates the notion that job satisfaction is higher in smaller than in larger firms. The focus is on whether SMEs have different EWE and (lower) management formality.	Management questionnaires.
67.	Subramony, M. 2009.	"A meta-analytic investigation of the relationship between HRM bundles and firm performance", in <i>Human Resource Management</i> , Vol. 48, No. 5, pp. 745–768.	None	Examines HRM bundles and performance, focusing on empowerment, motivation and skill enhancement, and shows all of them to be positively correlated with performance as measured by retention, operating performance and financial performance.	Meta-analysis of 65 previous studies.
68.	Wolf, E.; Zwick, T. 2002.	<i>Reassessing the impact of high performance workplaces</i> , Discussion Paper No. 02-07, Centre for European Economic Research (Mannheim, ZEW).	None	Assesses the productivity effect of selected personnel measures, showing that HPW measures have a positive impact on establishment productivity in Germany. Corrects simultaneously for multi-collinearity of the measures, unobserved heterogeneity among firms and endogeneity of the measures.	Data gathered from the IAB establishment panel, covering information for almost 14,000 German establishments in the year 2000, selected from the parent sample of all German establishments that employ at least one employee with social security. Data analysed using instrumental equations and fixed effect regression models.

	Author(s) and date of publication	Publication details	Gender dimension	Argument/Contribution	Method
69.	Wright, P.; Gardner, T. 2000.	<i>Theoretical and empirical challenges in studying: The HR practice-firm performance relationship</i> , CAHRS Working Paper Series, WP 00-04.	None	Focuses on conceptual issues concerning the link between HR practices and firm performance. Various studies on this topic are reviewed and analysed.	Theoretical.
70.	Zakaria, N.; Zainal, S.; Nasurdin, A. 2011.	"Investigating the role of human resource management practices on the performance of SME: A conceptual framework", in <i>Journal of Global Management</i> , Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 74–92.	None	Reviews some literature, notes lack of research on HRM in SMEs and performance, in order to make the case for SMEs in Malaysia to adopt HRM practices.	Literature review.

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