

The view from the workplace: Safety and Health in Micro and Small Enterprises in the EU

European Risk Observatory

National Report: Sweden

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1 Description of the national context

1.1 Swedish economy and employment at a glance

The Swedish economy is a mixture of markets and economic planning, public ownership and private ownership. It is largely export-oriented, featuring a modern distribution system and a skilled labour force. Exports of goods and services make up 45 % of gross domestic product (OECD, 2016). The resource base is primarily timber, hydropower and iron ore, the automotive and pharmaceutical industries, and telecommunications.

Recent figures from the administrative agency Statistics Sweden (SCB) show that about 4.3 million out of Sweden's population of about 10 million inhabitants are employed and 0.6 million people are self-employed (SCB, 2016a). The majority, 3.3 million people, are employed in the private sector (including the self-employed) and 1.3 million in the public sector: working for the state, county councils or the municipalities. The unemployment rate for Sweden was 7.2 % in May 2016, slightly below the EU-28 average of 8.6 % (SCB, 2016a).

The average retirement age, of 64 years for both women and men, in Sweden is among the highest in Europe. Sweden also has higher employment rates for persons aged 50-69: 62.6 % compared with 48.8 % in the EU-28 (Eurostat, 2016a).

As in most European countries, the employment structure in Sweden has changed since the post-war period. Agriculture, forestry and fishing have gone from 12 % in 1965 to 2 % in 2015, and the manufacturing industry from 30 % to 12 % during this period. Employment in the public sector has increased significantly over the entire period, from 15 % to 33 %, but the increase in public employment slowed down during the financial crisis in the 1990s and has since remained at a steady level. The service sector, which in this statistics base also includes a large part of the construction sector, has increased from 43 % to 53 % of the employment in the period 1965-2015 (SCB, 2016a).

The structural changes in economy and employment have been accompanied by an increase in the general education level, albeit with some geographical variations across the country: workers in the capital area and some university towns have a higher level of education. The regional differences in educational attainment are, however, smaller in Sweden than in most other OECD countries (OECD, 2016). Today, some 45 % of young women and 35 % of young men pursue university education. In addition, the increased automation and mechanisation has led to many traditional blue-collar jobs requiring skilled knowledge workers to program and operate technical systems.

Sweden has high participation of women in the labour market. In 2014, the gender employment gap, defined as the difference between employment rates of men and women of working age (15-64), was 3.4 percentage points in Sweden, compared with 10.5 across the EU-28 (Eurostat, 2016b).

Traditionally, the Swedish workforce is largely segregated into typical 'female' and 'male' jobs, where women dominate the public sector and many private service industries. This segregation is seen between and within sectors and workplaces, where men and women with the same profession in the same company or sector would still have different work tasks.

The population and labour market are increasingly more ethnically mixed. People born outside the Nordic countries increased by 39 % between 2003 and 2010 to 12 % of the population. This share has since grown, with the influx of some 300,000 refugees since 2013, especially during 2015 (Migrationsinfo, 2016). Including posted workers and other temporary migrants, EU citizens in 2010 made up some 11 % of the workforce and another 9 % were from outside the EU (EMN, 2011).

1.2 National OSH infrastructure and regulatory context

1.2.1 Main actors and institutions

The **Ministry of Employment** (*Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet*) is responsible for operationalising national strategies on occupational safety and health. Within the Ministry, it is the **Division for Working Life** that deals with issues related to the working environment, working hours and employment legislation.

The work environment policy of the current **Swedish government** is to contribute to a work environment that prevents ill-health, accidents and people being excluded, and promotes opportunities for development in the workplace for both women and men throughout their working life.

The government has identified three prioritised areas where more specific measures are needed at the moment¹:

- Zero tolerance of fatal accidents and the prevention of accidents at work
 - accident prevention measures for employees working at or on roads
 - foreign workers in the green sectors (forestry, agriculture, horticulture and so on)
 - market supervision against unfair competition
 - provision of information from the authorities to foreign employees, employers and self-employed people
- A sustainable working life
 - selection criteria for inspections
 - series of seminars in collaboration with EU-OSHA during its 2016-17 campaign: Healthy Workplaces for All Ages
 - knowledge summaries on new ways of work organisation
 - supervision of the personal services sector
 - employers' actions for adaptation and rehabilitation
 - Better psychosocial work environment
 - guidance on work without borders
 - strengthened inspection and information campaigns concerning working time
 - supervision of psychosocial working conditions in the elderly care sector
 - analysis of the working conditions in household services

As regulated in the Work Environment Ordinance (*Arbetsmiljöförordningen*, AMF, issued by the government in 1997), the **Swedish Work Environment Authority** (SWEA; *Arbetsmiljöverket* in Swedish) is the appointed central administrative authority for questions relating to the work environment and working hours.

SWEA is authorised to issue and enforce secondary regulations (provisions). The provisions are compiled in the Authority's book of statutes (*Arbetsmiljöverkets författningssamling*, AFS) which describes in more detail the work environment requirements to be met. Among the provisions are generic provisions aimed at all work environments, as well as detailed provisions targeting specific industries, environments, tools, and chemical or biological agents.

SWEA is Sweden's focal point to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) and represents the Swedish government on the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work (ACSH), the tripartite committee which assists the European Commission by preparing, implementing and evaluating all occupational health and safety activities. SWEA is also represented on the Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee (SLIC).

The **Inspection Department of SWEA** supervises the implementation of safety and health at work (OSH) regulations at company and organisation levels to ensure that the working environment meets the requirements set out in the OSH legislation. Annually, about 38,000 inspections are carried out by the almost 300 inspectors. The inspections check that the employer has an effective organisation for systematic work environment management. The work environment is audited from a holistic perspective, which should embrace physical, mental and social risks. In addition, special inspection campaigns may target a particular hazard, such as a special type of machine or job.

In addition, there are a number of other governmental bodies active in the OSH infrastructure. For instance, the **Ministry of Health and Social Affairs** (*Socialdepartementet*) is responsible for social security legislation, sickness certification, work ability assessment, occupational injury insurance and

¹ See Swedish government's website on 'A work environment policy for the modern working life'. Available at: <http://www.government.se/government-policy/fair-working-conditions/a-work-environment-policy-for-the-modern-working-life/>

pensions. The **Ministry of the Environment** (*Miljödepartementet*) is responsible mainly for environmental protection and chemical products.

The **Central Government Social Partners' Council** (*Partsrådet*) is the social partners' joint council on OSH and working life in the government.

1.2.2 Regulatory context — OSH specific

The Work Environment Act 1977 (*Arbetsmiljölagen*, AML) is a framework act which provides direction in broad terms and sets the goals for achieving a good work environment. The AML applies to all areas of occupational life, including students and the self-employed.

A central provision of the AML is that the work situation and the working environment must be adapted to human needs (AML ch. 2). Responsibility for the work environment is assigned as a general preventive duty for employers, but also for those who produce, import and market work equipment and tools, and for architects and designers involved in the design and construction of workplaces.

Work environment policies and legislation are consensus oriented, and chapter 6 of the AML is dedicated to cooperation in local OSH management at company level. The AML specifies that companies with five employees or more should have a safety representative, and companies with 50 employees or more should have a safety committee. The use of external OSH expert services is not required by law but is agreed upon in the collective agreements between the social partners in some sectors.

The general duties according to the AML are rarely invoked by the labour inspectorate. Rather, OSH risks are regulated in the provisions issued by SWEA. Since the 1990s, many specific provisions have been replaced by fewer and overarching function-oriented ones. The number of sections in the provisions has been cut to one-third.

The provisions on systematic work environment management (AFS 2001:1, *Systematiskt arbetsmiljöarbete*, SAM) are enforced by SWEA. The provisions specify the employer's responsibility and the rules on work environment management in terms of routines, knowledge and risk assessments of the work environment. The SAM provisions incorporate parts of the EC Directive on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work (89/391/EEC), for example concerning the work environment policy, allocation of tasks, expert assistance from outside and written risk assessments.

MSEs with fewer than 10 employees have a few exemptions from the SAM provisions concerning the requirement for written documentation. Risk assessments, action plans and instructions for hazardous work must be documented, but policy documents, routines and the annual audit do not have to be documented.

To complement the traditional focus on physical work environment factors, SWEA has, after several failed attempts, now issued provisions that explicitly concern the organisational and social work environment (AFS 2015:4). The provisions entered into force on 31 March 2016 and embrace three main areas: work load, working hours and victimisation. They are to be implemented within the employers' OSH management practices in accordance with the SAM provisions. The aim is that the new provisions should better describe *which areas* to work with and the SAM provisions describe *how* to work with the organisational and social work environment. The new provisions have been introduced with a large information campaign, especially directed to the employers, using infomercials on TV, on the radio, in the press and on social media.

1.2.3 Other regulations that may affect the OSH situation

Several other laws and regulations are concerned with the work environment, such as the Occupational Injury Insurance Act, the Ordinance on Flammables and Explosives, the Environment Protection Act, the Radiation Protection Act, the Working Hours Act, the Law of Equality of Men and Women, the Anti-Discrimination Law and the Law on Workers' Participation in Decisions.

Within the hotel, restaurant and catering (HORECA) sector, the results of the Swedish case studies have shown that rules about food safety and hygiene and about on-premises licences for selling alcohol may also have an effect on the OSH situation, especially since these regulations are enforced with regular inspections from the responsible municipality, and violation of these rules may lead to loss of licence and a subsequent loss of business for a restaurant.

In addition, many manufacturing companies have to follow various standards, from the more general European Machinery Directive (2006/42/EC) to very specific standards depending on the business area.

1.2.4 National OSH programmes targeting MSEs

The following are examples of national OSH programmes that either are specifically targeting MSEs or have proved to be particularly useful for MSEs:

- **Prevent, a non-profit organisation jointly owned by the social partners**

Prevent is a non-profit organisation jointly owned by the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) and the Council for Negotiation and Co-operation (PTK). Prevent was formed in 1942 with the objective of improving occupational health and safety at work. Services include training courses, books, a newsletter, checklists for risk assessments and much more. All material is developed in cooperation with researchers and the social partners. Although the services are directed towards establishments regardless of size, their work is especially valuable for the smaller companies with limited resources for acquiring and developing OSH knowledge and practices on their own.

- **Regional safety representatives (RSRs) employed by the trade unions**

The RSRs are appointed by the trade unions and represent the workers in OSH matters. RSRs are financed publicly and by the trade unions. They visit MSEs that have employees who are members of the trade unions and do not have a company safety committee. RSRs may ask for improvements, but cannot act as labour inspectors. The focus is on dialogue, and an RSR can act as a local safety representative if there is not one at the company. According to SWEA (2016), RSRs perform about 56,000 company visits per year.

- **SWEA labour inspections targeting MSEs**

In recent years, SWEA has performed several inspection and information campaigns directed towards MSEs in various sectors. For instance, in 2015, two campaigns were aimed at the construction industry. The first consisted of a web-based tool for employers on how to avoid fines by keeping updated on relevant OSH rules. This tool was used 37,000 times during 2015. The second campaign used radio commercials, industry press and social media to give information about the new fines and updated provisions about silica dust. A letter was sent to 22,000 MSEs. In 2015-17, SWEA was working with an inspection campaign aimed at MSEs in the transport sector, called 'Workplaces on wheels' (SWEA, 2016).

1.2.5 Industrial relations and worker representation

Sweden has a long tradition of social dialogue and a high level of union representation. The idea of self-regulation through collective bargaining by the social partners is strong (Eurofound, 2016). The main agreement (*Saltsjöbadsavtalet*) was negotiated in 1938 between the social partners, giving the social partners the right and responsibility to regulate pay and employment conditions. The social partners are often represented on advisory bodies or reference groups to government committees or enquiries. In Sweden, tripartite negotiations are rare because the social partners do not welcome the government or any other party intervening in collective bargaining.

The social partners have representatives working with occupational health and safety and some of the larger organisations have several representatives working full time with these kinds of questions. The employers' organisations and the trade unions are also organised according to sector and these sector organisations (both among employers and trade unions) have a well-established cooperation regarding occupational health and safety. Within many sectors, there are committees with representatives from the social partners meeting several times every year to work together on initiatives to support the development of good and safe working environments.

Before introducing new rules, SWEA has an established consultation procedure together with the social partners. A draft version of the new provisions is circulated for comments to the labour market parties, industrial organisations, certain national authorities, universities and others concerned. Comments are often taken into consideration before the provisions are adopted by SWEA.

1.3 Characterisation of the MSEs in Sweden

1.3.1 Economic profiles of MSEs

Only 0.09 % of registered establishments in Sweden fulfil the criteria for large establishments, employing more than 250 people. As shown in Table 1, 99.9 % of the establishments are small, medium and micro-establishments employing fewer than 250 people. Some of the owners of the sole proprietorship establishments are, however, also employed in other companies.

Table 1: Breakdown of establishments by size in Sweden, 2015

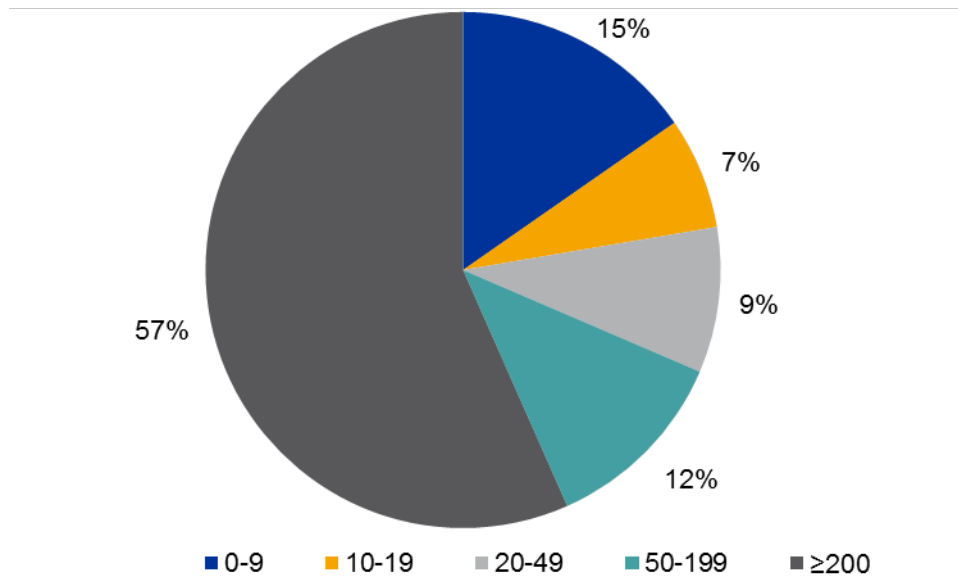
Type	Size (number of employees)	Percentage	Number
Sole proprietorship	0	73.81%	803,327
Micro	1-9	22.62%	246,132
Small	10-49	3.00%	32,641
Medium	50-249	0.48%	5,217
Large	≥ 250	0.09%	993
Total		100%	1,088,310

Source: SCB, 2016b

The increased number of small establishments is an effect of the changes in production environments, with large enterprises outsourcing parts of the production and services. This outsourcing with multiple networks of supply chains consisting of numerous micro- and small establishments has created a new employment structure. There is also a positive trend for women entrepreneurship, with more and more women starting to register companies.

The MSEs are also major employers. As seen in Figure 1, large establishments with 200 or more employees employed 57 % of the workers in Sweden in 2013. 31 % of the workers are employed in a company with fewer than 50 employees. Over the last 15 years, this trend is positive, with the share of workers employed in MSEs increasing.

Figure 1: Share of employees by establishment size in Sweden, 2013 (% of overall employment)

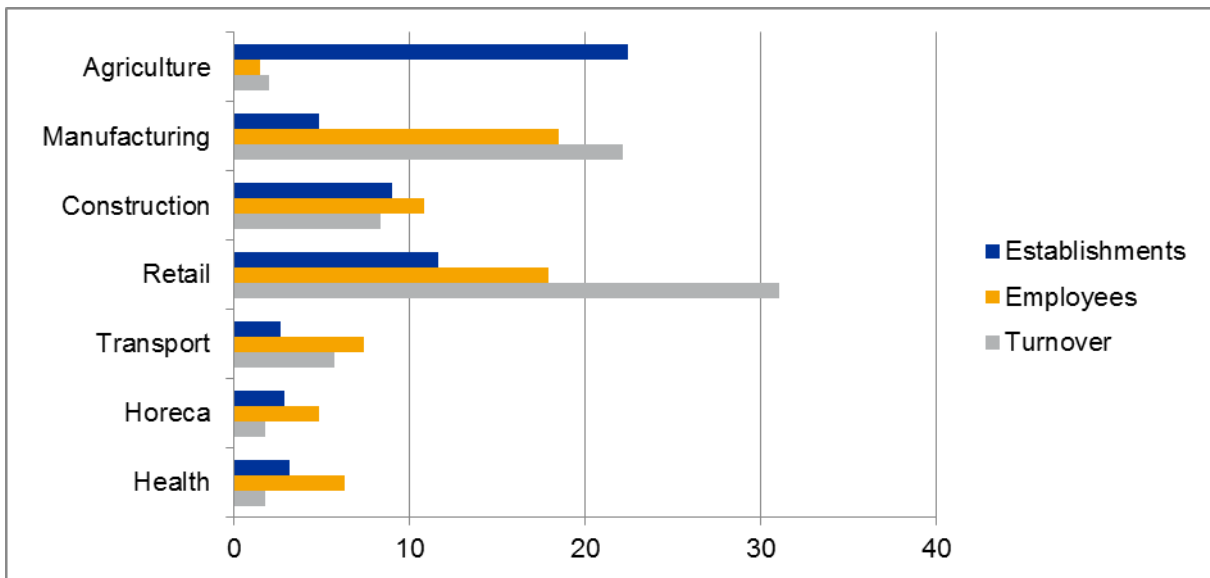


Source: SCB, 2016b

Figure 2 illustrates the shares of total turnover, employees and establishments by industry (Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community, NACE, sections) in Sweden in 2015 for the seven sectors covered by the case studies.

The Swedish case studies only cover the four following sectors: manufacturing, construction, transport and HORECA.

Figure 2: Share of establishments, employees and turnover (%) by industry (NACE sections) in Sweden, 2015



Source: SCB, 2016b

Most MSEs are found in the agricultural sector (A), which also covers fishing and forestry. But this sector engages few employees and generates low financial turnover.

The MSEs with most employees and highest value added are found in the manufacturing sector (about 20 % of the employees and 22 % value added) and the retail sector (18 % and 17 %, respectively).

1.3.2 OSH profile of MSEs compared with larger enterprises — deviations from findings of the literature review

The information system for work-related accidents (ISA) was created in 1978 by the predecessor to SWEA. The annual statistics on occupational fatalities, accidents and work-related diseases are produced annually by SWEA and SCB. Unfortunately, the information system does not contain data on accidents and diseases related to size of establishment, but only breaks it down between employed and self-employed.

Previous research reports systematic underreporting of occupational accidents and work-related diseases in MSEs and a generally lower level of OSH knowledge than in larger companies. A Swedish summary of OSH in MSEs describe a number of positive and negative features in the OSH practices (Bornberger-Dankvardt et al., 2005):

Positive features in the MSE work environment

- good working climate
- low absenteeism
- high variety of work tasks
- high level of job satisfaction because of greater influence on one's own work
- short decision paths
- more personal involvement in the work and direct feedback
- good social work relations and team work

Negative features in the MSE work environment

- time pressure and high work intensity
- deficiencies in the physical work environment
- increased risk of accidents
- high sickness presence due to difficulties in being away from work
- lack of human and financial resources
- lack of own specialists in occupational health
- improvised production solutions

Correspondingly, the findings from the literature review (EU-OSHA, 2016a) suggest that a substantial proportion of MSEs in Europe employ 'low road strategies'² to their economic and business survival. Thus, many MSE employees are likely to experience poor working conditions, lower job quality and a greater risk of accidents and ill-health than in larger companies. Albeit the mechanisms described in the literature review (EU-OSHA, 2016a) are recognised in the Swedish case studies, the overall findings from the 10 case companies paint a slightly different picture. Many of the case companies employ middle to high road strategies and engage in ambitious and well-founded OSH management practices. It is, however, reasonable to assume that this is explained by the positive selection bias in the sample. This is further discussed in the next section.

² Low road MSEs are those MSEs that adopt well-recognised bundles of organisational and business strategies that increase pressure on wages, working conditions and so on in the fight for the survival of their business.

2 Description of fieldwork and the sample

The interviews were performed during the period of December 2015 to May 2016. All case companies were taken from the list provided by TNS Sifo. First, contact was made by telephone, to the name and number of the contact person in the file, briefly explaining the purpose of the call, the project and the purpose of the interviews. Second, a one-page document was emailed to the contact person including the same information in informal language, including research ethics, and contact details for the Swedish research team. One or several days later, date and time for the interview would be agreed over telephone.

Of the 84 establishments supplied in the file, 17 were not MSEs but belonged to large national or international corporations, for example NCC, PostNord, DHL and St Gobain. Another nine establishments were considered to be too distant and require too much time and resources to be eligible for an interview. Five contact persons declined to participate and three cancelled at very short notice, one of them twice.

All interviews were held at the premises of the case companies, except one that for logistical reasons from the worker's point of view was held in a meeting room at the IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute. The interviews were all audio-recorded, after seeking approval from the respondents. The interviews were however not transcribed verbatim, as would be preferred in a study like this, due to a lack of resources. The respondent quotes are, however, written verbatim from listening to the recordings. Translations are made by the main author of this report.

2.1 General remarks on the fieldwork and the methods

The main challenges when booking the interviews were getting an interview with an employee. All companies with five employees or more are required by the Swedish Work Environment Act to appoint a safety representative. But since it is an assignment on a voluntary basis (although on paid working time), whereby the employees choose a representative among themselves, far from all companies actually have one. When trying to book the interviews, we first asked to interview the safety representative, and then, if there was none, asked to interview any other employee. On several occasions, the owner-manager replied that they were happy to volunteer their own time and meet for an interview, but that it was more difficult to find an employee willing and able to be interviewed. Two cancellations of booked interviews were made for this reason, when the manager had set up a time, only to find that none of the employees wanted to participate. Thus, it has not been possible to interview the employee who 'knows most about the OSH work', but rather we have interviewed whoever had time or was willing to participate. This may well have an effect on the final outcome.

2.2 Description of the sample

In all, 10 establishments were visited, distributed across the sizes and sectors as illustrated in Table 2. The aim was to get an even distribution of case companies, also in relation to the Danish sample.

Table 2: Swedish case study sample by size and sector

Number of employees	Manufacturing (C)	Construction (F)	Transport (H)	HORECA (I)	Total
5-9	2	1	1	1	5
10-19	0	0	1	0	1
20-49	1	1	1	1	4
Total	3	2	3	2	10

Table 3: Overview of the sample

Case number	Number of employees	Type of enterprise	Main business functions
Manufacturing			
SE03	Micro (5-9)	Independent (B2B)	Printing
SE04	Micro (5-9)	Independent (B2B)	Subcontract production of industry and household chemicals
SE05	Small (10-19)	Independent (B2B)	Manufacturing of material-testing instruments
Construction			
SE06	Small (10-19)	Independent (B2B)	Apartment renovation, service and ground work, and construction of new buildings
SE07	Micro (1-4)	Independent (B2C)	Installation and repair of windows, glass balconies and other glass works
HORECA			
SE01	Small (10-19)	Independent (B2C)	Restaurant
SE02	Micro (5-9)	Independent (B2C)	Restaurant
Transport			
SE08	Small (20-49)	Independent (B2B)	Port and terminal operator
SE09	Small (20-49)	Independent (B2B)	Transport, mainly of steel products and concrete elements
SE10	Small (20-49)	Independent (B2B)	Third-party logistics services

A representative geographical distribution was not intended and is not possible with such a small sample in Sweden, but the research team has purposely striven to achieve a mix between establishments in the capital area and larger cities, and in smaller towns.

The sample of case companies is not and cannot be representative of Swedish MSEs. However, it is good to reflect on the question of whether or not it is possible to evaluate to what extent the sample is biased and how. As the analysis will show, the results deviate from previous findings in the scientific literature, as well as from the researchers' previous experiences from working with OSH in MSEs. The interviewing researcher who also wrote up the establishment reports has the benefit of being able to compare previous experiences as a labour inspector at SWEA, where there is no element of voluntarism, as of course is necessary in studies like this. It is the perception of this researcher that one of the 10 establishments was representative of Swedish MSEs. The other nine case companies show considerably higher levels of OSH knowledge, interest and evidence of functioning OSH management practices than were expected by the researcher. Several respondents commented during the interview

how much they enjoyed talking about these things during the interviews and one even (jokingly) applied for a job at the research institute to be allowed to work with OSH full time.

The positive selection bias has been enhanced and refined all through the selection sample, starting with the companies that opted to participate in the Second European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER-2). In Sweden, the response rate for ESENER-2 was 21 %, of which 81 % agreed to participate in further studies (EU-OSHA, 2016b) and were included in the TNS Sifo file. Respondents positively interested in a topic are more likely to participate in a study, which further supports the likelihood that the case companies are positively biased.

Nonetheless, the research team are grateful for the participation of the 10 case companies and are confident that the interviews have elicited rich and meaningful data that contribute to the knowledge base of what works and why in MSEs in Sweden.

3 Analysis: data from the establishment reports (case studies)

The following analysis is based on the establishment reports from the case studies conducted in 10 MSEs of different sizes and in different sectors (see Table 2). The cases were first analysed individually, followed by a synthesis across the case studies. The small and heterogeneous sample does not allow reliable analysis across sectors or sizes.

3.1 Risk awareness

The risk awareness was perceived as high or even very high in most of the visited case companies. A majority of the respondents had not had any work-related accidents in their present companies, but a few had experienced serious and even fatal occupational accidents in earlier employment. These previous experiences have naturally had an effect on the respondents' risk perception and resulted in an increased willingness to invest and implement preventive measures.

The education level among the respondents, especially the owner-managers, was high. To a certain degree, this can be expected in Sweden, with a generally high level of skilled workers. But this does not necessarily explain the high level of OSH knowledge that was reported among the respondents and may be one reason for the observed risk awareness. The respondents displayed sound knowledge not only of the most obvious OSH risks — such as falling from heights or being injured when using tools at a construction site; cuts, burns and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) from restaurant work; and exposure to harmful pollutants and falling overboard in a port — but also of complex interrelationships of human, technical and organisational factors, and their possible effects on overall systems performance and human well-being. Such knowledge was not expected.

During the discussions about perceived physical and psychosocial risks, a few occupational risks that had been identified by the researchers, based on OSH statistics and previous research, were omitted or blatantly ignored by the respondents. The discourse on psychosocial work environment tended to focus primarily on high work intensity, time pressure and stress-related health issues. Yet several respondents also discussed the challenges with interpersonal relationships within the company and in relation to customers or other persons in the work environment, including harassment due to gender or ethnicity, workplace conflicts and language barriers.

3.2 Company OSH organisation and risk management practice

Four of the 10 case companies had integrated the company OSH management system into the system for quality and/or environment management, certified in accordance with ISO 9001 and ISO 14001. One of the companies in the transport sector, a port and terminal operator, was certified according to ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and the SWEA provisions on AFS 2001:1 on systematic work environment management. The case companies that have implemented OSH in the overall management system all

seemed to work rather effortlessly with OSH and risk prevention, as a natural part of the day-to-day operations, rather than 'riding side-car' in the production and decision processes.

One of the case companies, which is active within the transport sector and offers third-party logistics services, was heavily influenced by its customers in the fashion and textile industry who work actively with corporate social responsibility (CSR). In many respects, CSR is a business strategy closely related to OSH. CSR implies company obligations to have a positive impact on customers, communities, employees and suppliers, and also to follow the law, ethical standards and international norms. *Current CSR definitions and theories hold that companies should, at the very least, be held to international standards of human and workers' rights, and that they should consider environmental output regulations when making corporate decisions.* (UNEP/Setac, 2009, p.10)

Many of the social and ethical demands on the actors in the global fashion industry value chain can be considered very basic in a Swedish context. Yet the customers do require the case company to work through and reflect over a substantial number of issues related to labour rights and working conditions, and confirm that requirements are met before a contract is secured.

Among the larger case companies that had not implemented a management system, the OSH management and risk control practices could still follow a routine agreed upon by managers and workers, such as using specific checklists at given intervals. To the extent that the smallest companies in the construction and HORECA sectors could be said to have an OSH management system, it was informal, undocumented and based on oral communication.

3.2.1 Practices of acquiring OSH knowledge

Practices of acquiring OSH knowledge vary between and within case companies. Some of the respondents are keen to stay informed and actively subscribe to email newsletters, participate in training courses and seminars, and utilise their professional networks. Others have a more reactive approach, either making sure that somebody else is responsible for keeping updated, or not bothering at all, as illustrated in this quote from an owner-manager in the HORECA sector:

SWEA may be good in sending this kind of information but I wouldn't know, because I don't read it. You know, you read the things you are interested in, what feels relevant right now for me.

(Owner-manager, SE02)

Similarly, the owner-manager in a manufacturing company admitted that:

often, I read about it when there is a special question that is on the agenda at the moment, not before.

(Owner-manager, SE05)

This latter owner-manager trusted completely in the safety representative to stay informed and let him know of any important issues.

Conversely, in another part of the country, another restaurant owner describes how he is constantly pursuing the regional safety representative from the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union (HRF), asking it to come and visit the restaurant and check the work environment.

In all, SWEA is seen as having a limited role in the case companies' pursuit of OSH knowledge. Rather, it is the trade and employers' associations together with the trade unions that emerge as important conveyors of OSH knowledge and information.

Six of the case companies have contracts with external OSH expertise consultants that provide regular OSH information and arrange OSH training courses, when called for. Some companies subscribe to different web-based services that notify them when new provisions are issued.

3.2.2 Risk analysis practice

The companies that have integrated OSH organisation into an overall management system largely employed the same risk identification and risk analysis practices as when working with quality or environmental risks or non-conformities. As far as it could be assessed from the available documentation during the interviews, these companies had routines for risk analysis that were documented and followed, and the results of the risk assessments were communicated and monitored.

Other case companies had adopted simpler forms of risk analysis practices, such as using industry-specific checklists provided by Prevent or the generic template developed by SWEA and freely available on the internet.

Only the two smallest of the companies in the HORECA and construction sectors lacked routines for performing risk assessments of the work environment that would comply with the OSH regulation. Regardless of establishment size, a risk assessment and the subsequent action plan must always be documented in writing. The practice of the small construction company, which performs an inspection of an object and discusses challenges and suitable methods before taking on a new job, is hence not sufficient according to regulations.

Interestingly, both owner-managers in the construction industry, despite differing in size, professional niche and approach to OSH management, displayed a somewhat fatalistic attitude towards occupational accidents as something that cannot really be avoided — even if of course they will try. Sooner or later, there will be an accident. It is assumed by the researcher that this attitude has its roots in the traditionally high levels of occupational accidents and lost-time injuries that often can have very severe consequences.

According to the results of ESENER-2 study, the share of establishments in Sweden that answer that they regularly carry out workplace risk assessments rapidly increases with establishment size. Only 34.6 % of the establishments employing 5-9 persons answer that they carry out workplace risk assessments. This increases to almost double, 65.2 %, for establishments employing 10-49 persons, and to over 90 % for establishments with over 250 employees.

3.2.3 Risk communication practice

Like the risk analysis, routines and practices for risk communication vary among the case companies. All companies appear to have working informal routines based primarily on oral communication of results from safety rounds, risk analysis and suggested preventive measures within the company. The limitation with such informal routines is that they tend to be reactive and not very systematic. In most of the visited companies, however, the risk communication practice worked quite well thanks to high commitment and engagement in OSH.

The companies with implemented OSH management systems also have a system for communicating through formal channels, for instance on a dedicated place on the company intranet or through special OSH binders that can be found in a staff room or the like.

A safety representative in a manufacturing company explains:

The results of the safety rounds, the action plan and everything is of course available on the intranet for everybody, but we talk about the most important things that have come up, so that everybody has heard about it and knows that they can read more about it and where. (Safety representative, SE05)

In the larger of the construction companies, the quality, environment and OSH manager (KMA) has a special list that all employees and subcontractors must sign to show that they have read the information. The company has also translated the work environment plan, which is mandatory for most construction sites, into Estonian, to be more easily accessible to all workers.

3.2.4 Routines ensuring safe and healthy work

In addition to the risk analysis routines described above, most case companies have additional routines for ensuring safe and healthy work — with the same variations across the companies and naturally related to the level of the OSH management at large.

Routines are typically embedded in the ordinary work routines and linked to specific tasks, such as the onset of a new contract, a new type of job or equipment, induction of a new employee and so forth.

Even the smaller companies without documented routines still have some regular procedures they follow. The owner of the construction glass company described how they have planned the working hours to have better time to clean up in the workshop after a working day. This minimises the risks of cuts and enables them to finish earlier on Friday afternoons. With the assistance of the trade and employers' association, they also had a routine to check for asbestos when changing windows in older buildings.

Some companies also have routines for proactive employee health and well-being — more or less well documented — that include the possibility of getting physical exercise or a massage during working hours, medical health checks beyond what is mandatory, or arranging social activities.

3.2.5 Use of external OSH expertise

Six of the case companies buy in external support from private OSH expertise consultants. Of these six, some have an agreement with a 'traditional' (from a Swedish perspective) OSH expert consultancy (occupational health service) that can offer a complete range of services from a safety engineer, physiotherapist or ergonomist, as well as in occupational hygiene and medicine. Other companies use experts with a narrower scope, sometimes several services for various areas, such as one consultant to keep track on changes in legislation and standards, and another to assist in fire safety.

The services provided by the external OSH experts include information on new rules, training courses for managements and workers and participation in safety rounds or inspections of the work environment together with concrete advice on how to adjust and improve the workplace or equipment. Examples of training courses that have been given range from basic OSH knowledge and regulations to forklift safety, ergonomics for lifting and manual handling techniques. Previous studies have shown that MSEs mainly use medical services such as health check-ups and services related to rehabilitation, and to a much lesser extent preventive services.

Over the period when the interviews were performed (December 2015 to May 2016), the researcher could see a slight shift in focus among the respondents towards psychosocial aspects of the work environment. This is attributed to the new provisions on organisational and social work environment (AFS 2015:4) issued by SWEA that entered into force on 31 March 2016. SWEA introduced the provisions with an unparalleled information campaign, by means of all possible media. Half of the visited companies either had already participated or were planning to participate in a seminar or training course regarding the new provisions.

A common denominator was the importance placed on the support given from the various trade and employers' associations and trade unions represented in the sample. A major challenge from the owner-manager perspective, however, seems to be not availability of OSH expertise, regardless of type, but finding time and resources to use it. This was explicitly mentioned by five of the interviewed owner-managers. In the words of the owner-manager of a manufacturing company:

as for everything else, if one had unlimited time and money all would be easier. We do what we have time for, I guess this is not so uncommon in a company of our size. It is different if a company has five people who only work with OSH. (Owner-manager, SE05)

Furthermore, geographical distances were also mentioned as something that limited the use of OSH expertise.

The findings correspond rather well to the findings in the ESENER-2 study, where about 40 % of the establishments employing 5-9 persons answered that they use some kind of external health and safety experts to assist in company OSH management. The share increases to around 60 % for establishments with 10-49 employees.

3.2.6 Motivation for company OSH practice

Motivation for OSH practices in the case companies seems largely rooted in the personal values, norms and beliefs of primarily the owner-managers, but in some cases also the workers.

The most obvious case is the owner-manager of one of the restaurants who has a background as chairman of a large trade union, organising industrial and metal workers. The owner describes how his background influences his business decisions to a very large extent:

I have been working with OSH issues half my life, I have my ideology clear! (Owner-manager, SE01)

Contrary to what is common in the Swedish HORECA sector, all workers in that company are employed on a permanent contract and hence are covered by a collective agreement with the hotel and restaurant workers' union. 'Anything else would be unthinkable, with my background', says the owner, and he goes on to describe the reactions of the regional public employment service when he turned to them in search of new recruits:

They think we are weird, but it doesn't suit us to take someone in to work an hour in the kitchen. It doesn't work. An employee must know that the rent can be paid next month. If you are happy at work it also reduces the risk of accidents. (Owner-manager, SE01)

Even if the other examples are less ideological, it is clear that the importance of having one or more individuals in the company acting as 'human dynamos' for the OSH management can hardly be overestimated. This is especially evident when there is a good working relationship between the responsible owner-manager and the worker representative.

In four of the companies, the interviewed workers were especially driven, knowledgeable and active in the development of company OSH practices. In two of the companies, one manufacturing and one transport company, the safety representatives were perceived as playing a larger and more active role than the managers. As it happens, both these safety representatives are women with a university education, one in quality management and the other in work psychology.

Having customers that either impose specific demands or are prepared to pay for improved OSH and risk reduction measures does also have positive effects on the proactive OSH practices. This willingness to pay, however, seems to vary greatly with type of risk. Both companies in the construction industry talk about the risks from asbestos as an example of what is allowed to cost money, while reducing the risks of MSDs is not so readily accepted. The owner-manager of the large construction company states:

Everybody is afraid of asbestos, for that there is never a problem to take any extra costs for analysis, for example, but extra costs for renting a mobile crane to transport materials five floors up in an old building — no, that's not possible. (Owner-manager, SE06)

Across the case companies, there is little evidence to suggest that meeting legal requirements serves as a particularly strong motivation for OSH practices. Nor do the interviewed company representatives display any disdain towards these requirements. Legal requirements are generally seen as something natural to fulfil, but do not act as a motivator.

In the ESENER-2 study, fulfilling a legal obligation is said to be a very important reason for addressing health and safety in 87 % of the establishments with 5-9 employees, increasing to 91 % in the establishments with 10-49 employees.

3.2.7 Worker participation

In three of the companies (two manufacturing and the smaller construction company) it was not possible to perform an interview with a worker representative. This was in one case because the worker was sick and the other two because of high work intensity in the company. In the two manufacturing companies, the researcher did however have the opportunity to walk around the premises, saying hello to the workers, and, in the case with the sick worker, have breakfast and coffee with some of the other employees.

Sweden has a long tradition of worker participation; the first kind of formal safety representatives were introduced in OSH legislation already in 1912. Having a formally appointed safety representative in the company is, however, not as common as it used to be. The difficulty in getting a worker to accept the

assignment was addressed by several owner-managers during the interviews, who explicitly wished to have a discussion partner in the OSH work. The owner-manager of a manufacturing company says he has offered an increase in salary to the person willing to take on the assignment, to no avail:

When even a higher salary couldn't persuade them to become safety representative, I told them that I pay them too well, but they just laughed and said that they didn't want to. (Owner-manager, SE03)

The owner-manager has himself been a safety representative in his earlier career, believes it to be an important function in a company and says he would like to have someone with whom to discuss ideas on how to develop the company's OSH work. The owner believes that the difficulties in recruiting a safety representative can be traced to a loss of commitment in the society as a whole, and compares it to the difficulties in finding volunteers for his local football clubs.

The Swedish model that has fostered so many generations is dwindling, there aren't that many driving spirits left. The society has changed and entrepreneurship has changed. (Owner-manager, SE03)

All interviewed owner-managers assume full legal responsibility for the OSH management, but expect the workers not only to follow the rules and be careful — 'in practice everybody is their own safety representative', as heard during several interviews — but to participate actively in the daily OSH practices.

As described earlier, the safety representatives especially in one of the manufacturing companies were definitely instrumental in the OSH management:

It works quite well, except I am the one having to carry most of the load. I am the one who has to push when measures are needed and point out when anything is missing, or when there are new rules that concern us. It is not really my responsibility, but, since I am the safety representative, it is me who receives the information. (Owner-manager, SE05)

This company has rather clearly allocated the tasks in the OSH work, but not time nor resources:

This is an extra task for me so when there is a lot to do in my ordinary work as responsible for the laboratory, I don't have the time to do as much OSH work as I would like, really. [...]

That is the biggest problem with my position as a middle-thing, not being completely responsible, but yet expected to do the tasks. But that is the same for all [workers]; you don't have only one task but several tasks to do. It is clearly divided with areas of responsibility, but not for time. (Owner-manager, SE05)

The lack of time for the safety representatives to perform their OSH duties is commonly seen in MSEs. In this company (SE05), risk assessments through safety rounds were included and planned in the company's management systems, so time was duly allocated. But the safety representative says that she has ideas of several more things she would like to do if she had more time, for instance a follow-up survey of the last investigation on the psychosocial work environment in the company.

3.2.8 Good OSH practice examples

Good OSH practice examples in the case companies were found ranging from systems and organisational level to basic aspects at a 'nuts and bolts' level.

A common denominator was that the case companies where OSH was integrated in the overall management systems had better-functioning routines for risk prevention and continuous development of OSH practices. Several of the respondents talked about how the management system was a support in the OSH work, rather than an administrative burden.

The owner-manager in a small construction company (SE03) illustrated how even a small Swedish company can position itself in the value chain by making demands and influence a global corporate group. The owner-manager demanded that the manufacturer of his printing machines adapted the machines to fit a special cart for transporting stacks of paper to and from the machines. Albeit the owner did not hide the fact that this primarily improved the production process and increased quality, he was aware that it was also a significant improvement of the work environment, reducing physical load and the risk of MSDs. With a recently replaced hip, the owner argued that he struggled to get the young men

in the company to understand that they too will get old and broken if they do not use the tools available for lifting and transporting goods in the production plant.

Some examples were that companies (for example SE01 and SE08) had organised work tasks to increase work rotation and variation, in order to minimise repetitive movements and the risks of getting MSDs. Practical good examples found are for instance the use of available checklists for risk assessments that can be tailored to fit the working conditions, and establishing routines together with the regional safety delegate in the trade union.

3.2.9 Effectiveness of OSH management practice

Most of the case companies, 7 of 10, were assessed by the researcher to have a high level of risk control, 1 of 10 a medium level and 2 of 10 a low level. The assessment of the low level of risk control is primarily based on the lack of a systematic approach and documentation. Both companies did have informal routines.

The companies with a perceived high level of risk control could all show evidence of systematic routines that are documented, followed and communicated. Yet these systems would probably be less effective if the OSH management were not propelled by one or more driving forces within the companies. Personal norms and values, sometimes based on previous experiences of serious accidents, have been shown to have a great influence on the OSH management practices in these case companies.

If effectiveness is defined in terms of achieved objectives and the extent to which targeted problems are solved, it is difficult if not impossible to draw any conclusions about effectiveness from such a small sample. Is it the OSH management that is responsible for the absence of occupational accidents, low sick-leave rates and personnel turnover we see in the case companies or is it by chance? Adopting a more generous definition of effectiveness as being about 'doing the right thing', most case companies do a lot of right things. Whether or not it can be called systematic OSH management is, however, up for debate.

3.2.10 Classification of company OSH strategy

Based on the information given in previous sections — to the extent that it is at all possible to talk about distinct OSH strategies — the case companies displayed an overall management strategy that can be characterised as proactive, communicative and participatory.

The *proactivity* is, however, deeply embedded in the day-to-day operations. The measures and investments that improve operational performance are dealt with first: 'needs to have' is clearly prioritised before 'nice to have'.

The *communicative* and *participatory* approach is to a great extent explained by the size and ownership of the case companies. In a company with, for instance, 4-7 workers where the owner-manager is actively taking part in the production work, it would be difficult not to have a communicative and participatory approach. In many circumstances, the workers need to be able to work independently and take responsibility for customer contacts and some decision-making. Generally, the workers in the case companies are expected by their managers to actively take part in the OSH practices, by not only following routines and taking necessary precautions, but also suggesting and carrying out improvements.

Many of the case companies are also family-run establishments where several family members are on the board of directors and taking an active part in the operation. During the interviews, several anecdotes were shared about various positive and negative features of working with your children, parent or spouse and how this is dealt with. The possibilities that have followed from new information and communication technology are also tapped for company communication. A transport company (SE09) describes that it uses phone text messages to stay in touch with the drivers. Several of the case companies are on Facebook and Instagram, where they communicate their corporate image, if not OSH strategies. This might have a small positive influence when recruiting new personnel, as mentioned by the owner-manager of the same transport company (SE09), who said that an applicant mentioned the company's good reputation as one reason for applying for a new job.

3.3 Mechanisms

Determining factors

- **The role of legislation and sector-level regulation**

Based on the information gathered in the interviews with owner-managers and safety representatives, the knowledge of what is required through OSH regulation is generally well known in the case companies. Eight of 10 companies were assessed by the researcher as having a good working knowledge of OSH regulations and its implications. The remaining two were assessed as having superficial knowledge.

As expected, the specific rules at sector level, for instance the provisions regulating construction work, chemical substances and port operations, were well known in the companies to which they applied. These rules were explicitly referred and adhered to. But the generic provisions concerning ergonomics for the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders and the recently introduced provisions for the organisational and social work environment were also discussed. As previously mentioned, the intensive information campaign that followed the introduction of the latter provisions has been very effective in also reaching these smaller establishments.

At sector level, legislation in other areas has proven to have just as much of an impact as, or sometimes more than, the legislation specifically concerning OSH. In the HORECA sector, the rules concerning food safety, hygiene and licences to sell alcohol, and the way the governing bodies of these rules check for compliance, have been shown to have a certain effect. The manufacturing companies, especially SE05 and SE04, work with materials and products that are surrounded by rigorous legislative frameworks and are regularly audited by other authorities and organisations. Compared with these requirements, the self-regulatory approach of the work environment management system is seen as something rather basic to comply with.

None of the companies gives the impression of OSH legislation being a necessary evil. The rules should be met and, for several of the companies, they are seen as the lower end of what should be done. In a majority of the cases, customer requirements and internal forces push the boundaries beyond legislation.

- **The role of support from authorities and from external service providers**

SWEA visits about 5 % of all workplaces in a year (Statskontoret, 2014). Of the about 38,000 visits to establishments that are performed per year, almost 60 % are inspections and the rest are follow-up visits to check that previously required measures have been taken, to give information or to perform a measurement. About 70 % of the inspections lead to some sort of requirement on the employer.

Of the 10 visited case companies, eight had been inspected by SWEA at least once, sometimes, more than once. The restaurant that had not been inspected (SE01) is located in the middle of Sweden, at some distance from the nearest labour inspectorate office. The owner-manager had, however, been in contact with SWEA on several occasions and was a bit annoyed that they were not more forthcoming in giving him specific advice on OSH. He would most likely welcome an inspection. The other restaurant owner was inspected a few years back, leading to the compilation of an OSH binder with routines and checklists. However, the OSH binder did not appear to have been used much and the information had not been updated since it was created and checked in a follow-up inspection.

In all, SWEA inspections appear to have neither a dissuasive nor a long-lasting effect on these companies' OSH practices. Nor was SWEA mentioned as an important source of information, apart from the odd reference to the website and book of statutes.

Rather, as described in earlier sections, there are other legislative authorities and organisations that have a greater impact on the case companies, for instance the municipality's department for environment and health, which performs (or should perform) food safety inspections annually; the national accreditation body that accredits laboratories, certification bodies and inspection bodies in accordance with international standards and regulations (SWEDAC); the Swedish Chemicals Agency (KEMI), which supervises importers and manufacturers of chemical products, and carries out

inspections at workplaces; and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, responsible for ensuring compliance with the Swedish Environmental Code.

▪ Value chain effects on company OSH management

Both positive and negative value chain effects on company OSH management were observed in the case studies. Customers in all three manufacturing companies as well as in the three companies in the transport sector made explicit demands at systems and technical levels that form the basis of these case companies' OSH management systems and how they are implemented.

Negative value chain effects could be observed primarily in the construction sector, especially related to public procurement and what can only be described as a seriously flawed system in purchasing and planning construction work in the public domain. The owner-manager of one construction company, with extensive experience of working for the municipality, describes procurement arrangements that are impossible to fulfil with workers covered by a collective agreement and how this is compensated for by exaggerating the estimated working hours for individual work tasks. On a more positive note, recent years have also seen positive effects from the suppliers in the construction sector's value chain, with an influx of new tools and assistive devices to ease the physical load, together with a number of lighter and less harmful construction materials.

▪ The role of management style and social relations

Based on the information gathered during the interviews and the researcher's perception of the working climate during the visits (and sometimes the chat on the telephone when booking the interviews), all 10 cases display good social working relationships within the companies. A non-hierarchical and informal management style was prevalent, and the interviewed workers gave evidence of having good dialogue with managers, including on organisational issues.

As an example, the interviews in the port company were held in a conference room with the Managing Director, the administrative manager and the safety representative present together. When asked about worker participation, the safety representative turned to the manager and said:

I can talk to you in the same way I talk to anybody else in the company and I think it is damn nice that we can have such open dialogue. If I have 10 minutes to spare, I can just pop in to the boss and say hi, how are you doing, I think we need to look at this... (Safety representative, SE08)

In this company, they intentionally plan OSH training courses so that managers and workers participate together. This way, they get the same information at the same time and are able to discuss any practical implications and necessary actions for the company together. The day after the interview, the interviewed safety representative and the production manager of the company (who was not present during the interviews) were planned to participate in an OSH course regarding the new provisions on organisational and social work environment.

The communicative and participatory management style of the interviewed owner-managers and the perceived good social relations in the companies are believed to have a positive effect on the OSH practices. It is seen as highly unlikely that any of the interviewed workers in these companies would refrain from challenging their managers if something needs to be done, or put forward a suggestion for improvement.

▪ Other factors and the possible interplay of factors

All the case companies are covered by collective agreements between an employers' association and the trade unions. Despite the fact that Sweden has no legislation on the extension of collective agreements to enterprises that do not have their own agreements, the coverage is very high. In 2012, 85 % of workers and 100 % in the public sector were covered by collective agreements (Kjellberg, 2013). This high coverage and the stories told during the interviews of the assistance that employers and workers receive from their respective organisations show that the social partners play a vital role, despite a decreasing level of unionisation. While the owner-managers in the construction sector thought that the trade union for construction workers could be more active and do more for their members, especially

regarding ergonomics and physical load, their equivalents in the transport sector praised the trade union and the good working relationship they had with the local steward.

Company size and geographical location may have a certain impact. The small number of employees enables well-functioning worker participation and dissemination of information and makes it possible to have meetings where everybody can participate and speak their mind. The geographical location of a company may lead to difficulties when recruiting new employees with the right competence, but may add to the sense of familiarity when management and workers live in relative proximity and share a sort of social responsibility for each other and for the company.

3.4 Summary — what works and why?

The case companies generally have functioning and documented OSH and risk control routines; in six companies these are integrated in an operational management system for quality or management, of which three are certified according to one or more ISO standards.

The interviewed owner-managers are largely well educated with professional and OSH training and well versed in OSH risks, regulations and its implications on company and industry practices.

Having a 'human dynamo' in a company is seen as instrumental for effective OSH management, in terms of 'doing the right things'. We have seen owner-managers with more or less explicit norms and values whose personal attentiveness to and knowledge of OSH is seen as a strong determinant factor in the company OSH. Good interplay with similarly well-trained and knowledgeable workers and safety representatives also contributes to safe work environments. Some managers and workers have in different ways been involved in or observed serious, and even fatal, accidents and ill-health in previous jobs that are likely to have an impact on priorities, management style and decision-making.

SWEA, as chief regulatory and governing body for OSH, plays a limited part in the daily OSH practices in these case companies. For some companies, there are other regulatory and monitoring organisations that play a larger role in OSH management. For others, customer requirements have a certain impact.

It is clear from the interviews that OSH information and knowledge can be found in abundance. This seems, however, to be accessed mainly when a perceived need arises. The challenge for these MSEs is to find primarily the time, but also financial resources, to participate in information seminars and training courses and invest in tools and assistive equipment.

The size and scope of this material do not allow a quantitative analysis and triangulation of findings beyond what has been described in the sections above.

Recognisable patterns that can be discerned can be summarised as:

- The role of the human dynamo — personal values, norms and beliefs shaping company OSH practices.
- Supportive organisations — primarily sector specific that can give detailed advice on practical measures and actions, as opposed to increasingly function-based OSH provisions, based on a self-regulatory framework; a sort of 'tell me what to do but don't make me read and interpret the rules' attitude.
- Time and resources — ticking away the moments that make up a full day. Even the MSEs that are willing and interested in OSH have difficulties in finding time to sift through information and participate in dissemination activities. Some examples are given of the organisations that arrange them not checking for potential production peak periods for the intended participants.
- Informal and partly unsystematic work on occupational health and safety meaning that the outcome often depends on the manager's interest in, prioritisation of and knowledge about OSH.
- An increased interest in the psychosocial work environment, possibly due to the recent media coverage of increased levels of work-related mental ill-health in Sweden, and the introduction of the new provisions on organisational and social work environment.

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