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Health and Safety Representatives’
Contributions to Occupational Health and Safety:
Case Studies from New Zealand’s
Metal Manufacturing Sector

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Business Studies in Human Resource Management

at Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand.

Leigh-Ann Harris
2010
Abstract

This study focuses on the contributions that health and safety representatives make to occupational health and safety in New Zealand workplaces. It investigates how they and other organisational actors conceive the role purpose, how representatives interpret and enact their roles and how they impact on occupational health and safety.

The study comprises two business cases of organisations in the metal manufacturing sector. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews with eight representatives and 23 other organisational actors known to influence the health and safety representatives’ role, including the representatives’ managers, co-workers, health and safety managers, senior managers and a union representative. The interview data was thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and triangulated to attain a more accurate picture of reality (Mathison, 1988). The Danish National Working Environment Authority’s (2002) impact ladder was used in a novel way to systematically evaluate the representatives’ impacts.

Consistent with overseas findings, health and safety representatives also contribute to the improvement of workplace health and safety in New Zealand. Yet, representatives have different interpretations of their purpose, which influences role enactment. To characterise these differences, a typology was developed that included a range of ‘types’ into which representatives can be grouped: administrators, workshop inspectors, problem solvers and craft experts.

Commonly, all types of health and safety representative foster positive labour relations, and nearly all in this study were perceived by workers to improve health and safety by providing a legitimate avenue of redress. Otherwise, contribution differed among the types; administrators contributed by implementing and maintaining health and safety management systems; workshop inspectors improved workers’ attitudes towards health and safety; problem solvers facilitated improvements to production from a health and safety perspective; and craft experts influenced the development of standards and procedures for the management of hazards at the strategic level. Factors influencing health and safety representatives’ role enactment and impact appeared to relate to how the purpose of the role is defined and communicated at the workplace, the representatives’ expert power bases and abilities, and the nature of their job role.

The study identifies the implications of these findings for health and safety policy, training and further research. Finally, it highlights the value of a cross-perceptual approach to enrich understanding of the multifaceted nature of representatives’ contributions to workplace health and safety.
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## Glossary of acronyms

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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>Accident Compensation Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACOSH</td>
<td>Advisory Committee for Occupational Safety and Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BusNZ</td>
<td>Business New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECA</td>
<td>Employment Contracts Act 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMA</td>
<td>Employers and Manufacturers Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPMU</td>
<td>Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERA</td>
<td>Employment Relations Act 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSE Act</td>
<td>Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSE Amendment Act</td>
<td>Health and Safety in Employment Amendment Act 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSE Amendment Bill</td>
<td>Health and Safety in Employment Amendment Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS representative</td>
<td>Health and safety representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZCTU</td>
<td>New Zealand Council of Trade Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHS</td>
<td>Occupational health and safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHS committee</td>
<td>Occupational health and safety committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSH Bill</td>
<td>Occupational Safety and Health Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPE</td>
<td>Personal protective equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WERS</td>
<td>Workplace Employment Relations Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIRS</td>
<td>Workplace Industrial Relations Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSMP</td>
<td>Workplace Safety Management Practices programme</td>
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</table>