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**Testing the concept of the ‘good employer’
in a small enterprise context:
Central North Island**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

The assumption that small enterprise (SE) employers' are paternalistic and favour an individualistic approach to managing the employment relationship and occupational health and safety (OHS) risk and, consequently, that SE terms and conditions of work are generally inferior to large enterprises (LEs) has not been tested in SEs in New Zealand. This study examined the concept of a 'good employer' regarding employment relations (ER) and OHS practices in SEs in New Zealand. It explored this concept through a framework developed from the International Labour Organization's (ILO) socially Decent Work Index (DWI) (Bonnet, Figueiredo & Standing, 2003; Standing, 1997) and the work that was carried out by Bewley (2006), Boxall (1991), and Hull and Read (2003).

A qualitative approach was adopted which involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 12 SE employers. In an attempt to capture high and low OHS risk industries, as well as a range of unskilled to highly skilled jobs, three employers from: the construction, manufacturing, service, and retail industry sectors were interviewed between July and August 2010. The interview schedule was developed from the Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004 (WERS) (Kersley, Alpin, Forth, Bryson, Bewley, Dix, *et al*, 2006) to explore the key dimensions of a 'good employer': employment security, voice security, income security, skill reproduction security, and work security. The employers predominantly perceived the need to: promote a collaborative culture, adopt fair and understanding employment practices and provide a good work environment. How these 'good employer' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs were implemented in practice were explored by testing the adapted ILO framework of socially decent work.

The main themes emerging from the employers' perceptions corresponded with the two dimensions of the 'good employer' prioritized by the ILO (Bonnet, *et al*, 2003): employee voice security and work security, which are embedded in the Employment Relations Act (ERA) and Health and Safety in Employment Act (HSEA). Overall, these employers were considered as 'good employers' relative to arguments that a 'good employer' complies with the statutory employment minimum. However, when the characteristics of a 'good employer' were examined more closely subtle differences appeared between employers and these are best described on a continuum. At the one end employers appeared to be just compliant with basic statutory requirements while employers at the other end demonstrated higher levels of the characteristics that fitted with the concepts developed in large enterprises and the public sector.

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Abbreviations

ACC WSDS	Accident Compensation Corporation Workplace Safety Discount Scheme
ATITO	Apparel and Textiles Industry Training Organization
AWIRS	Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey 1995
DoL	Department of Labour
DWI	Decent Work Index
EC	European Commission
ECA	Employment Contracts Act 1991
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunities
EFILWC	European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
EMA	Employers and Manufacturers Association
EOC	Employer of Choice
ER	Employment Relations
ERA	Employment Relations Act 2000
ERP	Employment Relations Problem
HCM	High Commitment Management
HDE	Human Development Enterprise
H&S	Health and Safety
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
HSEA	Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992
IEA	Individual Employment Agreement
ILO	International Labour Organization

ITO	Industry Training Organization
LE	Large Enterprise
MED	Ministry of Economic Development
NACEW	National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women
NEON	National Equal Employment Opportunities Network
NOHSAC	National Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Committee
NZHRC	New Zealand Human Rights Commission
NZCTU	New Zealand Council of Trade Unions
NZWRPS	New Zealand Worker Representation and Participation Survey
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
OHSE	Occupational Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992
OHSMS	Occupational Health and Safety Management System
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SAI	Social Accountability International
SBAG	Small Business Advisory Group
SE	Small Enterprise
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SRJQ	Self-Reported Measure of Job Quality
TBL	Triple Bottom Line
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WERS	Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004
WHSS	Workplace Health and Safety Strategy 2015

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