



Lessons Learned. Closing USE2015 and moving forward to USE2017

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1. Introduction

We finished USE2015 with a closing session inspired on the example of the successful closing session of USE2013 in Nelson, New Zealand. The session hosted a few different parts – you can, for instance, read about the PhD award the first newsletter we published after USE2015.

Main element was that the remaining participants convened around five flipovers to summarize lessons learned at USE2015, and remaining questions to be discussed at USE2017. The flipovers were organized by various threads/themes that organized the USE2015 programme. The discussion at each one was presided over by a participant: Karel-Jan Alsem (health care organisations as SMEs); William Cockburn (ESENER and SESAME); Sisse Grön (national and sector level occupational safety and health); Garrett Burnett (firm level occupational safety and health); and Louis Polstra (governance, employment & SMEs). After some time for discussion around each flipover, Hans-Jörgen Limborg and Harm van Lieshout lead the crowd in a full circle along all five flipovers, and interviewed the ‘flipover chairs’ and some others on lessons learned and questions to be discussed. We summarize some of those lessons and questions for each of these five themes in section 2. Section 3 presents three general lessons and questions from USE2015 to USE2017. Section 4 presents the host of USE2017.

2. Theme-specific lessons learned and questions to be asked

2.1 Health care organisations as SMEs

On the theme of health care organizations as SMEs, one important lesson is to try to *combine physical and psychological research*. The other important lesson is to translate research findings into *practical and digital tools*. Such tools allow the sharing of information. They allow co-creation and open innovation. And the question was asked if the USE website and community could play a role in this respect. We will revisit this topic in the concluding section 3 of this research note.

2.2 ESENER and SESAME

From the perspective of the various USE2015 sessions based upon the ESENER and SESAME international research projects, there were a number of point brought forward.

One very obvious but relevant first lesson were first results from the new *ESENER* survey. The *visible quality of analysis* is important. There are more and innovative ways to use visualization to bring such results to life for different audiences. From a research methodological perspective, such projects require and benefit from *complementary visions on (different) methodologies*. Insight was gathered into promising future research possibilities. One relevant topic is the importance of adequately capturing *workers' voice* and allowing different possibilities to do this. Effectively *communicating* large survey results to *policy makers* remains difficult and an area that requires further improvement. But there is also further progress to be made in bringing ESENER to the *research*

community. A promising avenue – presumably both for policymakers and researchers - would be to use ESENER to gain a *more in-depth look at the national level*.

For the *SESAME* project, the first lesson is to *combine a policy perspective with the view of workers*. On the last front, it is particularly relevant to bring out the voice of workers in small enterprises. As with ESENER, a *mixed method* approach would be preferable: we need good *complementary* methods and expertise. And, also similar to ESENER, *communication* of research results remains a challenge. There is a need for *academic* output for communication to researchers. There also is a need for *practical* outcomes. Both a lesson and remaining question is the identification of a broad range of *drivers* and *opportunities*.

2.3 National and sector level occupational safety and health

A promising driver for improvement on the national and sector level is the use of *networks* as intermediaries. We learned lessons and have remaining questions concerning *intervention study methods* and challenges; they are similar across countries and sectors. And SMEs share similar issues. We learned about new types of *action oriented tools*. We need an *interdisciplinary* approach. And we need to hear the voice of *owners/managers*.

Important follow-up themes are:

- The *generalizability* of studies;
- ... but keep paying attention to *specificities* within sectors and SMEs;
- The *dissemination* of good prevention practice (a database?);
- Call for *participatory* methods;
- How can we *impose state regulated measures*?;
- How can we *include regulators and governing bodies* in USE;
- And last but not least we need to remember to include *third world* countries.

2.4 Firm level occupational safety and health

Important lessons we learned here is that, first, the *boss* is the heart of change. He (or she) is key to development and defines values. He is, alas, also *difficult to reach*. He can be reach through *networks*. Those networks can be used to share resources; to share common goals (help each other, not compete) and to foster a collaborative mindset. We need *trained facilitators* to reach those bosses and facilitate such networks. There is also a lot of *diversity* among bosses. We thus need a *sector* approach. And we *must contextualize*. Needs must be assigned. We cannot organize by *risk* only.

Important takeaways for USE2017 are, first, that what we want is *simple*, but that simple is *hard to achieve*. We should explore taking advantage of *restructuring* processes or new business design. We should also explore introducing occupational safety and health *competencies*. And, last but not least, we should explore how we as occupational safety and health people share our solutions.

2.5 Governance, employment & SMEs

Besides some lessons and questions to be discussed in the concluding section on USE in general, there were three important topics on this fifth and final theme, were we learned lessons at USE2015 but having remaining questions to be discussed at USE2017. First, it is important in the *evaluation* of health management to make more use of cost/benefit analysis and a *business case* approach. Second, we learned a lot but should learn more about *general innovation strategies*. Third, we need an *integrated, multi-level approach* to study governance questions regarding employment and SMEs.

3. Three general lessons/questions for the USE community

Across those five separate themes, there were three important general lessons/question for the USE community in general.

First, while USE is making steps from one conference to another in bringing together researchers and practitioners, we are still far from where we aspire to be in the level of interaction among them. More academic and government-related experts – among them EU OSHA representative William Cockburn – would love for their research to be translated into knowledge that can actually and easily be used in practice, but are not always in a position to do so themselves. Discussing research findings amongst us researchers is important, but does unfortunately not make for the most inspiring environment to attract SME owners (or, for that matter, government and governance officials) in droves.

Second, USE is also making steps into expanding the USE community from its original core of occupational safety and health (OSH) specialists into a broader SME knowledge community that includes specialists on other governance themes and fields than OSH. As an example of many others, my colleague and USE2015 chair Hugo Velthuisen (a specialist in the field of ICT and new business) acknowledged that he was pleasantly surprised by how the similarities in discussions on OSH at USE2015, and discussions in his own field of expertise, far exceeded his (already optimistic) expectations. Continuing to expand USE to include all SME business and employment governance issues rather than just OSH, will ensure that various fields can learn from each other's applied research and experience in helping SMEs find effective and efficient governance solutions that benefit them and their workers.

Third, in this digital day and age, various participants asked if USE could not provide a more permanent – and therefore almost by definition digital - platform for discussing and sharing SME research and governance practices globally. Everybody is enthusiastic about such a continuous platform; the question how to get it organized is, unfortunately, not as easy to answer. USE itself is not even an association at this point. The organizational responsibility for the next conference and its website is passed along from one volunteer to the next one, within the context of a still small but reliable international network. It is not important who will end up hosting such a platform; it is important that it gets created. All parties – including amongst others EU OSHA, ISSA, NIOSH and ourselves - would welcome such a platform and in principle be willing to share the information and resources that we have. We are not yet sure if, let alone how

we could it organized; but at least we have some wannabe musketeers to get there eventually: one for all, all for one!

4. USE2017 will be ...

Last but far from least, the host of USE2017 was revealed at the last part of the USE2015 closing session. An exciting whirlwind of a movie revealed the beautiful city of Denver, Colorado as the location of the USE2017 conference, October 25-27. So the fourth USE conference will be on its third continent. Colleagues from Africa, Asia and South-America can already gear up for a serious competition for the privilege of hosting USE2019!

The host for USE2017 will be the American National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Mr. Garret Burnett represented NIOSH and the USE2017 organization, and after the movie and his talk we could barely formally close USE2015 before everybody rushed to local travel agents (or their laptops, anyway) to book a flight for Denver for October 2017.

Thanks for being here with us in Groningen and making USE2015 into an exciting and intellectually rewarding conference. I look forward to seeing you all in Denver in 2017!