

CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING MASTERS DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

The Status of Job Quality and Wellbeing in the Engineering Consultancy Sector

Whilst an individual's psychological wellbeing depends upon a number of life circumstances, work is one of the most important aspects for most people. Unemployment sharply reduces wellbeing, but having a job is more than not being unemployed, and a negative work environment may lead to physical and mental health problems. Job quality is a multi-dimensional model and is the sum of the indices based on skills and discretion, social environment, physical environment, work intensity, prospects, working time, and earnings.

The construction sector has a reputation for high levels of work-related stress and poor wellbeing. Empirical research into measuring job quality for the construction sector has identified that workers have lower working time quality, lower intrinsic job quality, and fewer prospects. The discourse around mental health and wellbeing in construction to date has been mainly focused on the construction site and construction workers. There have been no studies investigating job quality and wellbeing aimed at the engineering consultancy sector and there is little available data on wellbeing.

This study is exploratory, investigating how the engineering consultancy sector performs in job quality and wellbeing compared to other sectors and specifically the construction contractor sector, across the EU15 countries, Malta and Norway. Empirical analysis is based on the 6th European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) collected in 2015 and is supplemented with additional primary data (2019) focusing on work intensity and wellbeing collected from UK architects, consultants and contractors.

Based on the 6th EWCS, consultancy and construction professionals (employed by contractors), have good job quality and wellbeing in comparison to other sectors. However, the consultancy sector is notably behind construction professionals and other sectors regarding its pay to young people, and construction is the worst sector for work intensity.

Results from the 2019 primary survey data differ from the 6th EWCS, suggesting that consultancy and construction professionals have lower (more intense) work intensity scores and poorer wellbeing. Similar levels of wellbeing are recorded for consultants and construction professionals, with 23% reporting poor wellbeing, and a further 12% at risk of depression. There is little difference between genders. Consultants in the 40-49 age group and construction professionals in the 30-39 age group have the poorest wellbeing.

The implications are that the mental health and wellbeing challenge for the consultancy sector and construction professionals may be bigger than previously thought. The study also challenges the perception that contractor staff are subjected to higher work-related stress levels and therefore have poorer wellbeing, than consultants. However, six of the seven job quality indices have weak-positive correlations with wellbeing, but the strongest correlations (moderate) are associated with the social environment, indicating that supportive line managers and the absence of humiliating behaviours are the strongest influences on wellbeing in the workplace, but also suggesting that other factors such as home life might be more influential on wellbeing than work.

A step change is needed to promote mental health and wellbeing to parity with health and safety, otherwise it may be another reason for the next generation to seek a career elsewhere, worsening the current skills shortage in construction.

Further research across the construction sector is required to validate the results of this study. Research is also required to understand how consultancy firms are responding to the wellbeing agenda, the cost

of wellbeing issues to the sector, and how the sector measures and shares the success of wellbeing initiatives and best practice.

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