

Lecture by Valerie Francis, 9 June 2005: The importance of workplace support and work flexibility for civil engineers

Senior Lecturer in Construction Management Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne Valerie Francis graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering (Civil) from the University of Adelaide in 1983. She has wide experience in commercial, industrial and domestic construction having worked for ten years in private industry as a senior structural engineer and project manager. Valerie also has a Master of Applied Science (Project Management) and has represented the Institution of Engineers, Australia at local and national levels. She worked as a Research Fellow for five years on two large ARC projects investigating construction efficiency. This research received two Australian Institute of Building Excellence Awards for Research and Development.

While Valerie maintains an interest in issues involving construction procurement and contractor and subcontractor selection her current research is exploring factors affecting organisational effectiveness and employee satisfaction and well-being. At present she is investigating the effect of a supportive organisational culture on the work experiences of civil engineers as well as working on a joint project with Dr Helen Lingard investigating the impact of work on the family life of white collar, project based employees within several public and private sector organisations.

Abstract

The importance of workplace support and work flexibility for civil engineers

This quantitative study examined the relationship between a supportive work culture and the work and life experiences of Australian civil engineers. Data were gathered from a sample of 1000 male and female civil engineers in a wide variety of work and family situations. The research investigated the level of work-family conflict perceived by civil engineers and the work-family balance values of their employing organisations. In addition the relationship between these work culture perceptions to other variables, such work and non-work satisfaction and burnout was investigated.

The results indicate that civil engineers who perceive their organisation's values to support both their work and family life reported greater job satisfaction as well as lower intentions to quit. The results also demonstrate the "buffering" effect of flexible practices and a supportive work environment. It was found where organisations had flexibility and organisational values supportive of work and family integration, the positive relationship between work-family conflict and burnout was reduced.

The implications of these findings for organisations employing civil engineers are discussed.