

WHS Risk Perceptions Information Sheet

Using Q-methodology to study construction stakeholders' perceptions of WHS risks

About us

We are a team of researchers from the Centre for Construction Work Health and Safety at RMIT University. We are conducting research to compare construction industry stakeholders' perceptions of the work health and safety (WHS) risks associated with a selection of commonly used construction methodologies or building systems.

It can be very difficult for decision makers to 'take the perspective' of people whose WHS could be affected by their decisions, especially if they have little experience of construction 'in the field.'

The fragmentation and complexity of the construction supply chain can create barriers for construction project team members to develop a common approach to WHS risk.

Why are we doing the research?

The effectiveness of WHS risk management relies on decision makers' ability to select appropriate ways to mitigate/control risks. Decisions are shaped by people's perception of WHS risks.

An understanding of how the different professional groups involved in the delivery of construction projects think about WHS risk can help to integrate WHS into decision-making early in the life of construction projects. This is because points of difference can be discussed and understood and stakeholders will be better able to understand WHS risk from the perspective of other project team members.

If industry participants differ significantly in their understanding of WHS risk, the effectiveness of WHS risk management can be seriously hindered. This is particularly true where professional decision-making could affect someone's health or safety at a later point in time.

Research shows that WHS risks in construction can sometimes be traced back to decisions made by professionals who are removed (in space and time) from site activities such as clients, architects, and design engineers.

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WHS Research

Centre for Construction
Work Health and Safety

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What do we need from you?

We are asking for professionals working in the construction industry to provide 45 minutes of their time to participate in an interactive interview. During this interview, participants will be asked to 'sort' a set of photographs according to the extent to which they present a WHS risk.

The photos depict different commonly used construction methods for the following main building elements:
i) facade; ii) roof; iii) building structure; and iv) building services.

Participants' reasons for sorting the photos in the way that they do will be explored to determine why they consider certain building systems or construction methods to present specific WHS risks. This will reveal how they think about WHS risk.

What will the research tell us?

This research will enable us to assess the extent to which construction industry professionals currently have 'shared mental models' of WHS. In particular, we will be able to tell whether different professional groups (architects, engineers, construction engineers, WHS professionals) think about WHS risk in a similar way. The research will also allow us to identify where and how perceptions of risk diverge. The research will provide a deep understanding of why professional groups perceive WHS risks in the way that they do.

What is the practical value of the research?

The research will inform the development of an image-based tool for use by members of diverse construction project teams. This tool can be used in the planning and design stages of a construction project, or in critical design review meetings, to engage project team members in open discussions about the WHS implications of decisions. The tool will help construction professionals to appreciate the WHS perspectives of other stakeholder groups. This will support the development of shared mental models of WHS within construction projects and create a strong and positive safety culture.

Who is funding the research?

This research is part of a five year international benchmarking study being undertaken in a subcontract arrangement with researchers at Virginia Tech. (USA).



Description: Precast reinforced concrete columns, beams and slab panels.
Source: CRC for Construction Innovation

Figure 1: A sample photo of precast structure system.

Research team

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