Work-Family Balance
Information Sheet

Fluctuating demands and unexpected events: An action research approach to improving work-life interaction in project-based work

Who are we?
We are a joint research team from RMIT University’s Centre for Construction Work Health and Safety and Melbourne University’s Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning.

What are we doing?
We are conducting research into work-life balance in project-based construction work. The research aims to:

— determine the effect of an action (participatory) research approach to the development, implementation and evaluation of work-life balance strategies on the workload and work-life experiences of project based teams;
— examine the relationship between workload fluctuations, work-life conflict (negative spillover) and work-life facilitation (positive spillover) in project-based personnel;
— contribute to the development of an integrated theory of work-life interaction in the management of projects; and
— inform the development of organisational support for employees’ work-life interaction in project-based industries.

Why are we doing the research?
The issue of work-life balance is of great importance to Australia. Driven by demographic changes, the aging workforce, low birth rates, increase in dual earner couples and the changing expectations of younger generations of employees, there is an urgent need to find practical solutions to the work-life balance problem.

Project-based work is subject to varying levels of intensity. Throughout the project lifecycle there are critical points at which components of the project must be completed. Immediately prior to these critical points, the intensity of work is typically very high. During these periods, project management teams are reported to work extraordinarily long hours, which impact significantly on work-life experiences. Projects are also characterised by considerable uncertainty and the occurrence of unexpected events. To minimise the impact of these events upon the attainment of project objectives, periods of high intensity work are sometimes necessary. At present, the impact of these peaks and troughs in work intensity on work-life experiences in project teams is not well understood.

Who will participate in the research?
The research team has secured the commitment of three partner organisations, which are significant players within the Australian construction industry. Two of these are construction companies while the third is a government agency, with responsibility for the oversight of workplace relations in Victoria.

What will the outcome of the research be?
The research will inform the Victorian government’s policy development in the area of work-family interaction and build a strong partnership between government and the construction industry. In addition, improvements in work-family balance are likely to improve the construction industry’s performance and ability to recruit and retain both male and female workers, helping it to achieve long term viability.
Who is funding the research?
Our work is funded by the Australian Research Council. Each of the partner organisations will also contribute to the research.

When will the research be conducted?
The research commenced in 2008 and is being conducted over a three year period.

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Participating organisations

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