

# CONSTRUCTION PROFESSIONALS' COMMITMENT TO THE ORGANISATION, WORK-LIFE BALANCE, AND WELL-BEING

Clara Man Cheung<sup>1</sup>, Paul Bowen<sup>2</sup>, Keith Cattell<sup>3</sup> and Jocelyn Davis<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil Engineering, Pariser Building, University of Manchester, Sackville Street, Manchester, M13 9PL, UK

<sup>2&3</sup> Department of Construction Economics and Management, University of Cape Town, Private Bag, Rondebosch 7701, Cape Town, South Africa

<sup>4</sup> Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Project Management Center for Excellence, University of Maryland, 1173 Glenn L Martin Hall, Maryland, USA

This theory-driven literature review aims to examine how work-life balance and emerging research in positive psychology may inform our understanding of the underlying mechanisms that affect the organisational commitment of construction professionals. Based on the review, we propose that work-life balance, well-being (i.e. sense of purpose and positive emotions) are linked to construction professionals' organisational commitment. From this we offer a research model and eight research propositions postulating that work-life balance directly affects organisational commitment via promoting sense of purpose and positive emotions. Furthermore, we propose two additional paths where positive emotions mediate the relationship between work-life balance and organisational commitment, and between sense of purpose and organisational commitment.

Keywords: work-life balance, well-being, sense of purpose, commitment

## INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance (WLB) and organisational commitment (OC), constructs that are well established in the occupational stress literature, have drawn considerable attention from scholars and researchers in different disciplines in recent decades, because they significantly affect important organisational outcomes such as staff turnover, absenteeism, and organisational citizenship behaviour (see Dwivedula *et al.*, 2016; Riketta, 2002; Timms *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, the two constructs have been found to influence one another (Sethi, 2015).

Construction contractors are typically unaware of the nature and level of occupational stress experienced by their construction project managers (Love and Edwards, 2005). The dearth of theoretical and empirical research on occupational stress within the industry has contributed to this situation (Haynes and Love, 2004; Love and Edwards,

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<sup>1</sup> clara.cheung@manchester.ac.uk

2005), and only in recent years have researchers turned their attention to this important topic (Lingard and Francis, 2009; Dainty and Loosemore, 2012; Bowen *et al.*, 2014; Leung *et al.*, 2015; Cattell *et al.*, 2017).

WLB is generally regarded as the balance that an employee needs between the time allocated to work and other aspects of life (e.g. family). OC is about employees' psychological and emotional attachment to their organisations. In the construction literature, the importance of WLB and OC is well recognised. For example, Lingard and Francis (2004; 2009) identified that long working hours, weekend work and excessive workloads, characteristics typical of construction industry jobs, negatively affected the WLB of construction professionals. Poor WLB has been found to be positively associated with employee burnout, mental health issues, substance abuse, and diminished family functioning (Lingard *et al.*, 2007).

Majid (2010) identified OC as an important factor in getting a safety culture embedded into the organisational culture of construction firms. However, despite the research into WLB and OC previously undertaken in the construction industry, little is known about the relationships between the two constructs, or the underlying mechanism driving the relationships. Bridging this knowledge gap could enable the industry to develop more effective and evidence-based interventions and advance theory building of both constructs in the construction context. This paper aims to narrow the knowledge gap by conducting a theory-driven literature review which examines how WLB and certain aspects of well-being may affect the OC of construction professionals. The paper extends other overviews of OC research (e.g. Rose and Muthuveloo, 2005) to specifically look into the construction context and consider how theoretical advances in WLB theory and the positive psychology theory of well-being (i.e. positive emotions and sense of purpose) can inform our understanding of potential mechanisms that affect OC. In particular, construction professionals' WLB is proposed to directly affect their OC. Such a relationship is mediated by sense of purpose and positive emotions. Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesised model that potentially explains "the how" between WLB and OC.

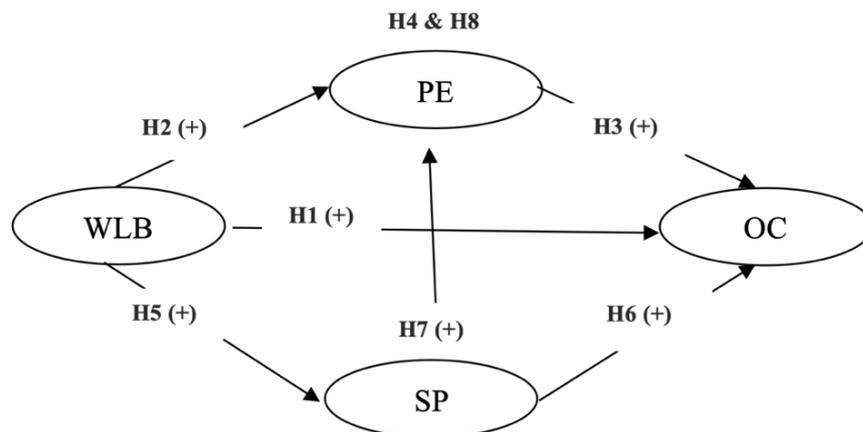


Figure 1: The hypothesised model

The arguments and associated hypotheses will be presented in the following sections in a concept-by-concept manner.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Organisational Commitment

Mowday et al.'s (2013, p.27) definition of OC - "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation" - is adopted in this paper, but it is noted that OC has also been conceptualised as an exchange between organisations and employees, where employees' involvement is offered with the expectation of rewards and benefits (Hall and Mirvis, 1996). Meyer and Allen's (1991, p.67) conceptualisation is broader, regarding OC to consist of three elements, namely: Affective commitment: An employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organisation; continuance commitment: An awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organisation; and normative commitment: A feeling of obligation to continue employment.

OC has been associated with a range of business outcomes such as lower turnover intent of the employees (Harrel *et al.*, 1986), lower absenteeism (Blau and Boal, 1987), higher job satisfaction (Ricketta, 2002), and higher productivity (Wright and Bonett, 2002). Similar findings were obtained in relation to construction. For example, Du *et al.* (2006) concluded that construction managers with high levels of organisational commitment have lower turnover intentions. Because of the benefits of enhancing OC, various research studies (e.g. Leung *et al.*, 2008) have examined the antecedents of OC in order to better understand the underlying mechanism of building it; for example, project assignment and acceptance, membership maintenance, job involvement, WLB, and performance feedback and workplace well-being (e.g. Leung and Chan, 2007; Brunetto *et al.*, 2012; Siegel *et al.*, 2005). However, the majority of those studies were conducted in a non-construction context. This paper aims to narrow this knowledge gap specifically for construction professionals.

Previous literature has acknowledged the importance of work context in influencing the cultivation of OC (e.g. Camilleri, 2006; Chih and Lin, 2009; Dwivedula *et al.*, 2016). In this context, construction work, characterised by outsourcing and "flexible firms" (Dainty and Loosemore, 2012), and the project-based mode of its execution, is different from non-project-based work such as manufacturing, because construction projects are usually frenetic, non-repetitive and temporary. Additionally, construction professionals need to perform their work in a dynamic and changeable work environment filled with uncertainties (Asquin *et al.*, 2010) and are thus more likely to work under stressful conditions (Lingard and Francis, 2004). High levels of job demand in construction have been linked to the burnout attributes of cynicism and emotional exhaustion (Pinto *et al.*, 2014). The unique features of construction work justify further empirical investigation into whether, and to what extent, the OC theories and practices found in other disciplines are applicable to construction management in general, and to construction professionals in particular. In fact, lack of knowledge about what influences the level of OC of construction professionals has possibly led to missed opportunities for organisations to develop and implement effective and evidence-based interventions to build OC, and thus enhance construction professionals' performance.

Maxwell and Steele (2003) summarised the antecedents of OC into four categories, namely: personal characteristics; job or role characteristics; work experiences; and organisational structure. The antecedents chosen in this paper fall into the category of job or role characteristics (i.e. work-life balance) and work experiences (i.e. well-being, positive emotions, and sense of purpose) because these categories encompass

characteristics over which construction project managers arguably have the most influence in managing their teams. Therefore, job or role characteristics and work experiences may be more influential in cultivating the OC of construction professionals.

### **Work-Life Balance**

Work-life balance is a frequently used term, but it has been subject to a variety of definitions (Kalliath and Brough, 2008). Sirgy and Lee (2016) proposed an integrated definition of WLB that comprised three elements: (1) balanced role commitment; (2) reduced role conflict; and (3) the absence of social alienation. The presence of these three elements gives rise to WLB, which then results in a bidirectional transfer of net positive emotions between work and nonwork roles, increasing or decreasing life satisfaction overall. To achieve WLB, individuals need to commit across the multiple life domains that are important to them by spending time and energy on each and deriving satisfaction from them equally (Sirgy and Lee, 2016). Lingard *et al.* (2007) define WLB for construction sector employees in terms of the extent of control and flexibility given to employees over how they do their work, the reasonableness of workloads, and the supportiveness of the work environment.

An overarching condition in the industry, though, is that construction professionals typically work very long hours as “an explicit component of the role” (Turner and Mariani, 2016, p. 248). Consequently, it has been found that they encounter WLB issues (Lingard and Francis 2004, 2009). WLB is difficult to attain because the demands of the work role are frequently incompatible with the demands of the family and other life domain roles (Sirgy and Lee, 2016). Supportive organisational policies such as alternative work schedules, telework, wellness programs, and support for child/elder care, as well as personal support systems such as spousal support, reduce work-life conflicts leading to higher levels of life satisfaction, which then yield higher levels of OC (Sirgy and Lee, 2016).

The connection between WLB and OC could be made by viewing WLB through the lens of Self-determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In particular, WLB requires autonomy, sense of purpose, and mastery. First, autonomy supports employees to take advantage of the available work flexibility programs, which allow employees to decide when and where to work. Autonomy also informs and supports the employees to establish goals across the multiple life domains which they deem important, while supporting their allocation of time and resources to attain those goals. This flexibility is key to WLB and, for example, was found by Eaton (2003) to be a significant predictor of OC among employees of highly competitive biotech firms. Lingard and Francis (2002) similarly found from their sample of construction industry employees that the job characteristics of long hours and schedule inflexibility - both negatively associated with OC - caused burnout, which led to lower OC. WLB initiatives introduced by the firms of these employees were found to enhance OC. Similarly, an investigation into the effects of the introduction of a compressed working week on a dam project revealed that the resultant improvement in flexibility had a positive effect on WLB (Lingard *et al.*, 2007), although such schedule changes may not be generally acceptable to all construction industry employees (Lingard *et al.*, 2008; Townsend *et al.*, 2011). Notwithstanding findings that work-life experiences do not appear to affect the sexes differently, Lingard and Francis (2002) surmise that this may be due to the underrepresentation of women in the construction sector, where survey samples typically involve far more men than women. In a subsequent study of

women working in the construction sector, Lingard and Lin (2004) argued that OC would be improved by the introduction of career development opportunities and just reward allocation processes. Second, sense of purpose for the employee supports their ability to develop their goals across multiple life domains and align resources appropriately to those goals.

Finally, mastery is supported by the sense of satisfaction attained through accomplishing their goals across multiple life domains; competencies arising from success across multiple life domains also support a sense of mastery in other life domains. Better WLB yields positive emotions which spill over into other life domains and, in turn, benefits WLB (Timms *et al.*, 2015). Insufficient WLB across multiple life domains causes distress for the individual, resulting in conflicted or reduced commitment to the organisation as well as adverse personal consequences to the employee such as burnout (Keeton *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

*H1: Construction professionals' work-life balance (WLB) positively affects their organisational commitment (OC).*

### **Well-Being**

Well-being at work is a core construct in positive psychology. It comprises two elements: A eudemonic element (e.g. sense of purpose) and a hedonic element (e.g. positive emotions) (Robertson and Flint-Taylor, 2008). Eudaimonic well-being incorporates variables such as “meaning and purpose in life, supportive social relationships, and feelings of mastery” (Diener *et al.*, 2017, p.134) and in the workplace this is apparent in people who derive a sense of purpose from their work activities (Arnold *et al.*, 2010). Hedonic well-being involves positive emotions, which effectively cause an “upward positive spiral” leading to augmented emotional well-being (Arnold *et al.*, 2010, p.452; Fredrickson and Joiner, 2002, p.172), whereas hedonic well-being is enhanced by an overall sense of purpose (Arnold *et al.*, 2010; Fredrickson *et al.*, 2003). Conceptualising positive psychological well-being as comprising elements of both net pleasure and purpose fits well with the organisational context, since it suggests that part of the experience of well-being originates in positive feelings arising from work activities that are regarded as “worthwhile” (Arnold *et al.*, 2010; Robertson and Flint-Taylor, 2008). In the construction literature, WLB was found to have a positive association with well-being (Rowlinson *et al.*, 2009) and a negative association with mental problems (Kotera *et al.*, 2019). To further demonstrate how construction professionals' well-being could influence the relationship between WLB and OC, the following sub-sections divide well-being into positive emotions and sense of purpose.

#### *Positive Emotions*

As mentioned above, to achieve WLB, construction professionals need to have clear goals (purpose) and values to determine what roles are important in what life domain and to be able to align their personal resources, accordingly, thereby deriving satisfaction from each domain. Their satisfaction could lead to positive spill over (Sirgy and Lee, 2016), which includes: positive emotions from different domains “spill over” into other domains; experiences and skills from one domain transfer to and enhance other domains (role enrichment); and role integration or low role conflict across multiple role domains.

According to the Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001), positive emotions build people's physical, social, intellectual, and psychological resources, thereby

building resilience and higher levels of life satisfaction (Cohn *et al.*, 2009). It also expands our attention to broader perspectives, helps us generate more creative ideas and actions, supports more inclusive teams, and promotes more flexible mindsets (Cohn *et al.*, 2009) - all of which are essential to enhance OC.

Interestingly, while research on the OC of employees was initially studied to reduce costly attrition in organisations because it predicted intention to stay, OC has also been found to contribute to performance outcomes in organisations (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Findings from research by Herrbach (2006), using a sample of 365 engineers, suggest that positive emotions support an approach response rather than an avoidance response, and that net positive emotions are linked to beneficial outcomes for the employee and their organisation. Herrbach (2006) confirmed his hypothesis that affective commitment is at least, in part, the result of experiencing positive emotions: “affective organizational commitment was related to experiencing a higher frequency of positive affect at work, even when controlling for dispositional affect.” (p.638). Herrbach goes on to suggest that a virtuous cycle may result in which more positive emotions yield greater affective commitment, which, in turn yields more positive emotions at work.

Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

*H2: Construction professionals’ work-life balance (WLB) positively affects their positive emotions (PE);*

*H3: Construction professionals’ positive emotions (PE) positively affects their organisational commitment (OC); and*

*H4: Construction professionals’ positive emotions (PE) moderates the effect of work-life balance (WLB) on their organisational commitment (OC).*

### **Sense of Purpose**

As noted above, to achieve WLB, construction professionals need to have a clear sense of purpose (SP) and some level of autonomy (Eaton, 2003) in order set goals by life domain and align resources equitably among them to assure satisfaction across all life domains. Because employees need to distribute focus across domains rather than singularly focusing on the one domain in order to obtain WLB, WLB supports SP and thus leads to higher OC. Furthermore, resolution of role conflict reduces stress, thereby increasing the net positive emotions experienced by the individual (Sirgy and Lee, 2016). However, misalignment of values, goals and resources across multiple life domains gives rise to inter-domain stress which diminishes the employee’s ability or perception of their ability to act with purpose, actions congruent with their values. This misalignment may reduce the net positive emotions experienced by the employees, thus building the virtuous spiral and diminishing OC. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

*H5: Construction professionals’ work-life balance (WLB) positively affects their sense of purpose (SP);*

*H6: Construction professionals’ sense of purpose (SP) positively affects their organisational commitment (OC);*

*H7: Construction professionals’ sense of purpose (SP) positively affects their positive emotions (PE); and*

*H8: Construction professionals' positive emotions (PE) moderates the effect of sense of purpose (SP) on their organisational commitment (OC).*

## CONCLUSION

Managing OC represents a major challenge for organisations today, specifically in construction organisations and professional practices where the resources are finite, and the nature of employment is often temporary, contract-based, or specific to a particular project. As a result, motivating the employees to deliver quality project performance and retaining them becomes a daunting task. Therefore, we need to understand the antecedents and mechanisms that lead to OC. However, these facets have not been widely studied in the construction literature. This paper aims to narrow this knowledge gap by presenting a conceptual model based on WLB literature and emerging research in the field of positive psychology. The model proposes that WLB directly affects OC via promoting well-being (i.e. sense of purpose and positive emotions). Furthermore, positive emotions is seen to mediate the relationship between WLB and OC, and between sense of purpose and OC.

The implications of this study are manifold. Scholastically, this study addresses the limited research done in exploring the antecedents and mechanisms of OC in the construction industry context. In addition, given that organisations today need to deal with the problems of job hopping and employee attrition, this study will be able to reveal the type of work experience or condition (i.e. WLB, positive emotions, and sense of purpose) that is most important in cultivating the OC of construction professionals. Finally, this research throws light on interventions that can be applied to make work more attractive and thus better retain project professionals in the same organisation.

A key objective of future research in this area would usefully be to gain a fuller understanding of how recent advances in positive psychology could inform our understanding of what factors, and by which mechanisms, the development of OC in construction professionals may be facilitated. More specifically, the aim will be to empirically examine if WLB and well-being could influence the OC of professionals working in high-risk industries like construction. This focus would allow comparison across industries to be conducted so as to understand whether the proposed model works differently in different high-risk industry settings. Following this line of thought, articulating the multi-level nature of such a model according to job titles would be particularly relevant, for example, the level of comparison between construction professionals and construction workers. A survey-based approach is proposed for the collection of the necessary data to test the proposed model and concomitant hypotheses using structural equation modelling.

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