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Quality of Life: Psychosocial Environment Factors (PEF) in the Event of Disasters to Private Construction Firms

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Abstract

In the last decade, both natural and man-made disaster events in Malaysia bring hindrance to construction firms' operations. Disaster events causing stress, anxiety and depression among people which leads to lose of working days. This research reports on *psychosocial environment factors* to private construction firms in the event of disaster. A semi-structured interviews were conducted among six (6) construction firms and the data were analysed using content analysis. The findings revealed that three (3) psychosocial environment factors (i.e., job characteristics; role in organisations; and social aspects) affected by man-made disasters; while job prospect and organisational factors distressed by natural disasters.

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1. Introduction

The construction industry has identified as one of the most hazardous industries in many parts of the world. The

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nature of the construction work is physically demanding which influence the quality of life on employees mortality, workers' compensation, injuries and fatalities (Chong & Low, 2014). However, the frequency of disaster events across the globe over the years had led to the increase of psychosocial environment risks (i.e., job characteristic; role in organisations; social aspects; job prospects and organisational factors) among the construction employees.

Apparently, the construction industry has become more stressful in dealing the nature of the trade and disaster events (Boschman et.al, 2013). Hence, it is crucial to consider the psychosocial environment factors when dealing with construction firms and their workers (Alavinia et.al, 2009). On the occurrences of disaster events, many parties such as company management; interest groups like investors, suppliers or clients could be affected (Low, Liu, & Sio, 2010). Disaster events can be categorized into two, man-made and natural disasters. Man-made disasters events are such as equipment or system failure; human error (sabotage, terrorist); IT failure and security breach; utilities, property and services failures; external error (outsourcing issue, fraud, syndicate, public transportation disruption, workplace violence). Additionally, events of natural disasters are the earthquake; mass movement (landslide, land sinking); storm (lightning, thunderstorm); hydrological (river flood, flash flood, coastal flood); wildfire (forest, land fire); and extreme temperature (heat wave, drought) (MAMPU, 2014).

Concerning the above, European Statistics reported that subsequent to disaster events, 14,000 cases were filed on stress, anxiety and depression among people in construction firms which leads to 340,000 working days lost in construction trades (Boschman et al., 2013). This data supports the exploration of psychosocial environment issues that affect the construction firms and their workers.

2. Quality of life of private construction firms in events of disaster

Both man-made and natural disaster events cause significant damage and loss of lives, properties and organisations (Abdul-Rahman, 2014; Stringfellow, 2014). Over the past decade, about 532,851 Malaysians were affected (EM-DAT, 2015). Kuala Lumpur flash floods 2013, East-coast Malaysia river floods 2013, thick haze 2015 are some of the disasters that affected the operational of construction firms in Malaysia. Parts of the area covered by these disasters affected to some private construction firms underwent construction activities which eventually effects the quality of life. Quality of life measurement is to measure the extent to which people's 'happiness requirements' are met (McCall, 1975). Another definition of Quality of life is the degree to which a person enjoys the important possibilities of his/her life. Three major life domains are: Being, Belonging, and Becoming. In the construction field, quality of life is defined on how well workers can perform their jobs at present and in the near future, - the individuals' capacity and the work demands (Hengel et al, 2010).

Embedding a culture of quality of life is to tackle pressures on the environment and resources in any societies in the event of disasters. This is to strengthen resilience against disaster events, at the same time without severe losses and damages on social, economic and environmental aspects in construction industry. However, in Malaysia, the application of the right framework/model associated to employee-related quality of life in private construction firms are still lacking (Hays, 2015). As such, this could create acute disruption to their firms' construction activities and operations when disaster struck (EU-OSHA, 2015). Mismanage and lack of supervision in private construction firms in the event of disasters could downgrade the quality of life of their employees due to miscommunication and depression (Boschman et al., 2013). Furthermore, according to Wen et.al, (2012), post-disaster events increase the physical diseases and symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder among individuals and these consequences causing the adverse quality of life. As such, prior establishing a strategy of quality of life in private construction firms, it is imperative to understand the culture of the firms to prevent abusive disaster management plan.

As for private construction firms, embedding quality of life prior disaster events, bring means the firms' culture and practices for long-term care, to sustain business growth and operation efficacy. Understanding the culture before establishing the quality of life strategies into the construction firms is important to prevent abusive disaster management plan. Therapeutic Psychosocial Environment Framework (TPEF) by Bell (2015) defines five elements (i.e., psychosocial environment; physical environment & staffing; allocation of funding; policies & procedures; and organisational philosophy) for the quality of life of private construction's firms. Meanwhile, a study conducted by Werezack & Morgan (2003), further identified psychosocial environment could be divided into five (5) factors. These are job characteristic; role in the organisation; social aspects; job prospects; and organisational factors. The combination of both ideas is presented in Figure 1.

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