

Successful OSH coordination in the construction industry

In this Danish project, scientists from The National Research Center for Work Environment shadowed and conducted interviews with 12 OHS coordinators. The purpose of this empirical production was to investigate the professionals' identities and aspirations of OHS coordinators, what OHS measures the coordinators implement and how they do it.

Background

Western society in general has pursued a strategy of improving OHS in organizations by urging companies to seek professional advice and competence in the battle against negative health effects of work; to live up to legislation and to design, implement and maintain strategies concerning OHS. This is also true for the construction industry – an industry infamous for being one of the most hazardous industries to work in. Particularly in terms of accident risks and physically exerting work. The service of providing this advice and competence is overall, taken care of by OHS professionals, and in the construction industry, the OHS coordinator fills an increasingly central role as OHS professional.

In recent research, the complexity of the roles of OHS professionals in general and OHS coordinators specifically, have been pointed out. In practice, there is some debate, while little consensus on what the boundaries for OHS professionalism are. This inconsistency is a challenge, both because OHS professionals have to navigate many different roles in relation to OHS, and at times face a lack of organizational knowledge about, and trust in their skills. Also because OHS professionals have a hard time separating themselves from for instance, human resource professionals, line managers and LEAN consultants. To make matters even more challenging, the effectiveness of OHS professional practice have indirectly been criticized for making doubtful contribution to better OHS, where researchers have instead pointed towards legislation and inspection as effective ways of improving OHS.

Within recent research on OHS professionalism, there is some agreement, that improving the knowledge of what roles and practices contribute to more effective OHS professionalism would be a productive endeavor. Better knowledge of *how* OHS professionals improve OHS, would benefit to make visible, and allow for more qualified discussion, of the intangible borders for the emergent profession of OHS professionals.

Results

The results show that OHS coordinators have wide aspirations of improving OHS among construction worker but that these aspirations are limited by a number of barriers for impactful practice. The analysis of the shadowing observations shows that coordinators implement a number of measures in their work. At the same time it shows that the bulk of these are in the lower levels of the hierarchy of controls and that OHS coordinators must master a complicated set of relational practices to achieve the implementation of OHS measures.