

"The federal Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees is conducting an inquiry into the shortage of engineering and related employment skills, and its impact on infrastructure development.

The committee has been asked to consider the implications of the shortage for infrastructure delivery and the impact on economic development, cost, efficiency, safety and disputation. It will also consider the impact of the long-term outsourcing of engineering activities by government on skills development and retention in both the private and public sectors. It will consider options to address the skills shortage using alternative procurement models, and look at strategies to develop and retain engineering talent in the private and public sectors through industry training and development.

Incentives to the private sector through the procurement process to undertake skills development, and the consequences of skills shortage in the construction sector to the public sectors' capacity to effectively procure and manage infrastructure projects will also be explored."

A few comments in response to the above request:

Why do we have a skills shortage? There are skills out there which are under-utilised because the industry is not giving them the opportunity to gain local experience; they may have foreign qualifications and experience, but these are not being recognised by the industry. They managed to migrate to this country under the skills program; so why are their skills not being recognised by the industry and why are they letting them go to waste?

Why do local kids not want to go into engineering? Those practicing in the engineering field are doing so for their own fulfilment and not necessarily advocating others to join their ranks; why? Probably because they feel that they wouldn't want their kids to go through what they have gone through and their experiences; these being, under recognised, underpaid. Why make little money after studying hard and working hard if you can make easy money in providing financial advice with no risk attached?

Why do engineering students move on to other fields after gaining their degree? Because they get paid better jobs in other industries which recognise the transferrable skills which the students have acquired in their engineering studies.

Why do graduates who do get into the engineering field move on to other fields after a few years in the game? Because they are underpaid and their skills are not fully utilised. They are bogged down with bureaucracies from Government Agencies which do not allow innovative ideas to flourish because they want to do things the way "they have always done it this way". There is no challenging work out there for the budding young engineers!! It's interesting for the first few years because it's all new; but after that, they realise that they are not allowed to question the convention and if you do, they will get criticised be seen as the "black sheep in the crowd". So, why hang around when you could be earning more like their peers in other industries?

I have heard from several graduates in the engineering industry who are so frustrated with the level of skills development and innovation suppression that they want to get out of the industry or not want to work on projects for particular clients. A lot of the young graduates do not have the same level of persistence that the older generation had and they will get out if something drastic is not done about the behaviour of some clients (in particular large state government agencies).

I hope the above is of some assistance.

Regards,

Manji Chhabhadia