



WORK IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

The construction sector is divided into building construction, civil engineering, and specialised construction activities, including the demolition of buildings, for example. Most companies operate in specialised construction activities, but in terms of turnover, the largest category is building construction. The construction sector is a major employer and a very male-dominated field. The majority of construction companies have fewer than five employees. The number of employees in the sector varies significantly according to economic cycles.

There are means for managing the workload factors in the construction sector

Work in the construction sector entails many workload factors that affect work ability. Workload is caused by various work-related physical, psychosocial and cognitive demands, which may vary according to the nature of work. In addition, many work environment risks and exposure agents increase workload. It is important for employers and supervisors to identify the workload factors associated with each kind of work. Reducing harmful workload and strengthening job resources can improve work ability as well as reduce sick leave and disability risk.

SOLUTIONS



Identify and reduce risks related to the physical workload.

You can, for example, modify the work and work arrangements, increase variation in work tasks and ensure good work ergonomics and necessary assistive devices. Also ensure adequate work induction.

Manage psychosocial workload.

Invest in fair leadership and supervisory work. Ensure that there are sufficient human resources and induction. Try to anticipate what might happen and take that into account when planning work. Strengthen the employees' opportunities to influence their own work and develop work in co-operation. Communicate upcoming changes clearly and timely.

Support continuous learning.

The transformation of work creates needs for new skills related to digital solutions and artificial intelligence, for example. Make it possible for employees to develop their competence continuously. That helps the workplace respond to future work-related challenges.

Create psychosocial safety in the workplace.

Talk together about what the future looks like and what kind of challenges and impacts it will introduce for each person's work. Promote a culture of dialogue, in which matters related to work ability are discussed regularly and can be addressed at a low threshold as early as possible.

Provide sufficient support for work ability.

Develop effective practices for early support for work ability, sick leave monitoring and returning to work. Future work ability is a result of joint efforts!

50%

Musculoskeletal diseases are the most common reason for disability in blue-collar professions in the construction sector

26%

Cardiovascular diseases are the most common reason for disability in people working in specialist positions in the construction sector

29%

Work modification is the most common work ability support in the construction sector

Source: Varma's data, 2019–2022

What do we know?

In the construction sector, there are several simultaneous physical, psychosocial and cognitive workload factors. Job resources can promote work ability and reduce experiences of harmful workload. The aspects that construction professionals consider key job resources in their work are the independence and content of work, opportunities to influence their own work and social relations at the workplace. In addition, many perceive their work meaningful.

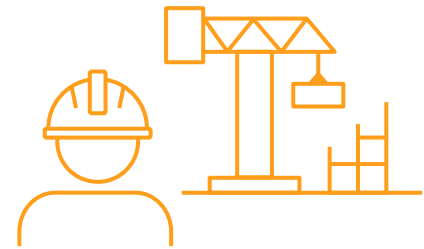
Why is this important?

In many construction professions, the risk of disability is higher than in other sectors. Workload factors can, if they persist, have many negative effects on employees' work ability. Work in the construction sector puts a strain especially on the musculoskeletal system. Musculoskeletal diseases are the most common reason for both sick leave and permanent disability.

What should be done?

It is important for construction sector workplaces to identify and prevent workload factors. The key is to come up with organisation-level solutions for managing the physical, psychosocial and cognitive workload. An individual employee cannot independently manage the workload factors of their work alone; they need communal structures and solutions as support. Solutions can be related to, for example, the reduction of physical workload, ergonomic tools, the allocation of breaks at work, the development of leadership and supervisory work, competence development and the creation of a psychological safety workplace.

It is important to look after work ability also in times of changes.



KEY WORKLOAD FACTORS IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

- Awkward working postures, such as working when kneeling, squatting or hands raised above the shoulder level, abundant amounts of standing or walking
- Excessive amount of work, haste and time pressure
- Challenges in leadership and the functioning of the work community
- Interruptions, disturbances and the need to keep many things in mind at the same time
- Noise, hand-transmitted vibration and other risk factors in the work environment, such as various types of dust and chemical exposure agents
- Varying temperatures, heat, cold, draught and dampness

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HOW THE BUSINESS BRIEF WAS MADE:

The solutions are based on a publication in Varma's publication series "Tietoa työkyvystä" (in Finnish), which examines, mostly based on Finnish research literature, the workload and resource factors in the construction sector, as well as work ability and disability of construction workers and specialists.

Read the publication on [our website \(in Finnish\)](#).

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