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Survey Respondents

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Executive Summary

This report should be considered in the context of the offshore oil and gas industry, which provides employment opportunities for employees with many different skill sets. However, the workforce operate in an environment characterised by shift work, remote working, gender imbalance, travel distance and physical activity. Given these challenges, responses with regard to work life balance might reasonably be expected to differ from those reported for a more ‘typical’ job.

The study attracted a response rate of 40% and the responses by company are generally proportional to the numbers employed. Two companies had a higher than expected response rate; one had generally positive results, whilst the other was more negative. This indicates that employees with both negative and positive views took time to respond, thus helping provide a balanced view.

Responses from female workers are so low that representative analysis of the female workforce is impossible. The industry may wish to consider how it might change to offer a work life balance and working environment that better accounts for the needs of 49% of the typical working population.

Forty percent of the workforce now travel over 200 miles to their usual point of travel offshore. This presents both opportunities and challenges to the workforce; the opportunity to live where they choose but with the disadvantage of rising travel costs and disruption. This is a personal choice for employees and overall has only a limited impact with regard to work-life balance.

The average age of the OCA workforce is above the UK average and there is still evidence of a mid-career gap. Given that this gap has been prevalent for three decades, consideration needs to be given that it may represent a failure of the industry to retain this age category.

Views of the 3/3 rota are associated with the challenges of working with a reduced headcount. Sixty-two percent disagreed or disagreed strongly that the changes had “no impact on the number of staff working in my area”.

The 3/3 rota pattern is now worked by 56% of the workforce, compared to 17% of the workforce working three weeks offshore in 2007 (MacGillivray, 2007). The three main rota patterns reported were 2/3, and two equal time rotations, 2/2 and 3/3.

In terms of work life balance 26% are satisfied but a much larger proportion (52%) are dissatisfied. Typical jobs in the UK usually see this pattern reversed. A large proportion of those dissatisfied with their work life balance work the 3/3 rota. Similar dissatisfaction with work life balance relates to those with the longest tenure, those employed by certain companies and those with the role of technician.

Work has a more negative impact upon family life than family life has on work; statements concerning to work-family conflict received a high level of agreement. Limited evidence was found that employees are reporting that levels of fatigue offshore are hindering activities and output for their employer.

Statements describing the recent changes offshore receive the highest levels of agreement when related to the disadvantages of working offshore. The statement with the highest level of strong agreement was “I find it more difficult to recover from a trip offshore” (45%). This indicates that work-life balance for those who work offshore is not just an issue of working remotely; the recovery periods also impact upon their return to the family.

Since 2015 rota changes have made the negative aspects of working offshore more of a problem. There are some potentially positive aspects to the changes e.g. Ease of taking holidays; enhancement of these may mitigate against the remote location and nature of the work.
Notwithstanding the extreme physical environment of offshore work, some employers have been successful in making the remote work environment palatable, suggesting that further enhancement is possible. In relation to positive statements regarding their actual work, relationship with manager and colleagues, and the ability to manage their own workload, levels of combined agreement were above 60%. Respondents appear to be content with the current offshore working environment, although a small percentage are very dissatisfied. However, only 24% of respondents believe they have the right balance in their personal life and work-life and 34% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are treated well by their OCA employer.

Views on actual work undertaken remain reasonably positive. There is little employee dissatisfaction with how they are managed on a day to day basis. The respondents seem to know what their role is, what is expected in their role and they consider they have the resources necessary to complete their work. The highest level of strong dissatisfaction relates to the rota worked; over 40% were strongly dissatisfied.

Two-thirds consider their lifestyle to be more important than the money they earn. However, 61% were dissatisfied with their pay and benefits.

The OCA workforce believe that work affects their health in a greater proportion than the national average for the UK. The perceived impact of work on health increases with the length of rota. Those on the 2/2 rota report a response pattern more like the UK average, where work does not impact upon health for most. Those on 3/3 rotas and those who work externally on the installation are more likely to report that their symptoms were caused, or made worse, by work.

The aggregated mean fatigue score for all respondents is consistent with a level of normal fatigue. The mean for those on a 3/3 rota rises to a level indicating substantial fatigue. The perceived impact of fatigue relates to declining concentration and possibility of increased errors in the workplace.

Workers are spending longer offshore and 57% of respondents reported that the sleeping environment has deteriorated. This will compound the effects of longer rotas. Reasons for this may include the reported increase in sharing a sleeping cabin, noted by 67% and the disagreement by 46% that noise exposure in the cabin has improved.

Over four fifths of the workforce work either day shift only or night shift only. Figures from this survey reveal very moderately lower level of fatigue for those that don't work swing shifts.

The level of provision and use of employer-provided health and wellbeing benefits exceed or are comparable to UK norms in all cases. Some companies seem to offer better support packages.

The impact of social media offshore is complex, with further investigation needed. The use of social media is a personal choice and whilst this may bring benefits such as helping to keep in touch with family, it might also limit team cohesiveness offshore and eat into sleep periods at the expense of recovery.

The Mental Health Assessments Tool (MHAT) data suggest that the psychological wellbeing is no worse than it was 26 years ago (Parkes, 1992), and is within expected ranges. However, reporting of psychological distress in the 3/3 rota was greater than those on the other rotas.
The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scale (WEMWBS) data clearly suggests that the state of wellbeing among the current workforce is lower than the national average. The proportion of participants reporting low scores and working on the 3/3 rota is almost double the proportion of participants reporting the same level but working other rotas.

Reduced wellbeing is also linked to dissatisfaction with work-life balance and a range of safety features including sleeping environment and noise exposure. It may be that changes to some of these factors would enhance the perceived wellbeing of workers on the 3/3 rota, however that is outside the scope of the present study.