



W R F
SERVICES INC.

Working Local:
A Study of Labour Mobility
in Canada's Industrial Construction Sector

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PREFACE

In our research on labour mobility in industrial construction published in *Working Mobile: A Study of Labour Mobility in Canada's Industrial Construction Sector*, we reported that financial incentives or necessity are the main inducements to working mobile and that factors related to certification or union travel cards and benefits did not constitute barriers to working mobile. However, we did discover that matters related to quality of life – especially, marriage and family – were the greatest obstacles to working mobile. We identified that the majority of workers on major industrial projects were part of a defined group of workers who ordinarily or “regularly” work mobile, and who travel from project to project, often together. The negative quality of life factors we measured were most pronounced in this group. We highlighted the significant implications of these findings – there is a reliance on a group of workers who “feel like the unacknowledged backbone of the construction trades,” who are working mobile out of necessity rather than choice, and are resigned to working mobile themselves but would certainly not recommend this to others. In a time when the industry is facing labour supply challenges, particularly on large remote projects where mobile work is a necessity, these sentiments pose obvious concerns.

Recognizing the limitations of our previous study in that our data was collected at sites where it would be most likely that workers would be mobile, this study was commissioned in order to provide a control group of workers who worked local. Hence, *Working Local: A Study of Labour Mobility in Canada's Industrial Construction Sector*, is based on data collected from questionnaires gathered from some 1214 workers in construction and conducted focus groups across Canada among workers presently working local. Most of those surveyed – by far – ordinarily work local.

In what follows, we outline the top-of-line results from 1214 questionnaires, the results of our analysis by ways of cross-tabs, a narrative of our qualitative research findings, and a comparison of the quantitative and qualitative analysis with what we reported in *Working Mobile*.

Gratefully acknowledged is the assistance of Dr. Wayne Norman, Statistical Consultant, of Hamilton, Ontario, who assisted and advised on SPSS analysis with direction from WRF Services. Also acknowledged is the assistance of Rob Joustra, a summer intern and graduate student at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, who assisted with data collection, and Dan Postma, WRF Services, who recorded and transcribed the findings of a focus group in Halifax. However, any errors are the responsibility of the authors.

1.0 METHODOLOGY

1.1 Quantitative: On-site Survey by Questionnaire

1.1.1 Purpose

The survey was designed to reveal:

1. The profile of the local worker in industrial construction (Questions (“Q”) 1-12 – “Employment Data” and Q’s 13-18 – “Employment Qualifications”);
2. The presently local worker’s job and work history (Q 19-24);
3. The factors that affect local worker’s willingness to work mobile versus working local (Q’s 25-37). Is it economic necessity or economic payoff, career enhancement, quality of life, or a life-style choice? Further, what are the obstacles to working mobile versus working local?;
4. The influence of safety and camaraderie on workers’ choosing their next job (Q 38);
5. Some demographic particulars (Q’s 39-43) that will contribute to the development of the profile of the mobile worker; and
6. To serve as a “control” for the results of our earlier research reported in *Working Mobile: A Study of Labour Mobility in Canada’s Industrial Construction Sector* (2005).

1.1.2 Number of Interviews

In total, 1214 completed questionnaires were obtained from some 33 job sites and focus groups in the Atlantic provinces, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairie provinces, and British Columbia. The ratio of questionnaires from each region to the total obtained approximated the population of each region relative the population of Canada.

1.1.3 How the Sample was Obtained, and the Rationale for Field Targets Chosen

Our objective was to administer surveys to three groups: traditional building trades, alternative union, and non-union (which includes the “merit shop” in the West) across every region of Canada.

Typically, the questionnaire was administered to workers on site immediately following the regular “safety meeting.” Following a brief explanation of who was sponsoring the survey, who was conducting the survey, and how the surveys would be used, the questionnaires were distributed for completion. Except for the questionnaires from Quebec, a representative of the research firm was on site to distribute and recover the completed questionnaire, and to answer any incidental questions from site contractors and workers.

1.2 Qualitative: On-site Focus Groups¹

1.2.1 Purpose

The focus groups were designed to confirm (or contradict) the findings of the quantitative research, to elicit anecdotal data that might “flesh out” results obtained from the quantitative research, and to surface issues and perspectives by way of the dynamics of group discussion that were not brought out by the questionnaires completed individually. Our objectives were as follows:

- ✓ Understanding more fully the differences between those working mobile and those working local;
- ✓ Identify the differences between those who work mobile and who work local in respect of quality of life; and
- ✓ Compare the differences of perception and attitudes between mobile workers and local workers in respect of working mobile.

1.2.2 Number of Participants

From October 10th to December 19th 2006, some forty-five (45) local workers participated in five focus groups.

1.2.3 How the Sample was Obtained, and the Rationale for Field Targets Chosen

Five focus groups with forty-five participants were organized by Ray Pennings of WRF Services in liaison with contractors and union organizers at five sites:

- ✓ A hotel conference room in the City of Grande Prairie, Alberta, on October 10th 2006;
- ✓ A regional union headquarters at the City of New Westminster, British Columbia, on October 11th 2006;
- ✓ A union local hall in the City of Mississauga, Ontario, on November 7th 2006;
- ✓ A union local hall in the City of Winnipeg, Manitoba, on November 23rd 2006; and
- ✓ A union local hall in the City of Halifax, Nova Scotia, on December 19th 2006.

Participants were recruited either by way of a union organizer, business agent or by way of a contractor, were offered pizza, coffee, and soft drinks during the focus group, and were paid a small honorarium for their trouble as is standard for focus group participation. Sites were selected to give regional representation that might reflect any differences from region to region.

¹ N.B.: We were unable to schedule a focus group in Quebec.

2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In *Working Local: A Study of Labour Mobility in Canada's Industrial Construction Sector*, we administered questionnaires to some 1214 workers in construction and conducted focus groups across Canada among workers presently working local. Most of those surveyed ordinarily work local although there was a subset of approximately 20% who, although working local on their current job, would be classified as a "regular mobile" worker. We did so in order to compare findings in *Working Mobile* (2005) with our findings, here, in *Working Local*.

2.1 Key Concerns Tested

1. The profile of the local worker in industrial construction (Questions ("Q") 1-12 – "Employment Data" and Q's 13-18 – "Employment Qualifications");
2. The factors that affect local worker's willingness to work mobile versus working local (Q's 25-37). Is it economic necessity or economic payoff, career enhancement, quality of life, or a life-style choice? Further, what are the obstacles to working mobile versus working local? and
3. Some demographic particulars (Q's 38-43) that will contribute to the development of the profile of the local worker;
4. A comparison of attitudes among apprentices versus journeymen in respect of working locally or mobile;
5. A comparison of age demographics (15-29, 30-49, and 50-plus) in respect of working locally or mobile;
6. A comparison of "married" versus "unmarried" in respect of working locally or mobile;
7. A comparison of Red Seal "plus" multi-ticket with all others surveyed. Is it true that the more qualified, the less likely to work mobile?;
8. How does 'first job' influence whether or not go mobile?;
9. A comparison of responses from regularly mobile ("some" or "most") in respect of quality of life and job satisfaction with the rest of respondents;
10. A comparison of responses from region to region; and
11. To serve as a "control" for our earlier research reported in *Working Mobile: A Study of Labour Mobility in Canada's Industrial Construction Sector* (2005).

2.2 Key Findings

- Even though in this study they were surveyed while they were working local, regular mobile workers indicate the same negative quality of life assessment compared to other construction workers. And the perception among those who ordinarily work mobile about the quality of life associated with working mobile is decidedly negative;
- In almost all significant categories, there is no significant variance between mobile and local workers in respect of working mobile. However, while mobile workers were unlikely to encourage their children to enter the trades, local workers were likely to encourage their children to enter the trades;
- Red Seal and additional certifications is seen as a means to greater flexibility and employability, particularly as a requirement for working mobile. In *Working Mobile* (2005), we found that 47.3% were Red Seal certified and 34% claimed some other certification. But in the current study of those presently working local, we found that 28.9% claimed a Red Seal certification in their present trades and 22.3% claimed some other certification. In *Working Mobile*, some 81.3% had either Red Seal or other certifications compared with 51.2% in our study of those currently working local – a difference of 30.1 percentage points. Red Seal and additional certifications is seen as a prerequisite to working mobile; and
- The largest segment of those surveyed were recruited into the construction trades by way of a friend or a neighbour. This suggests that the most effective recruiters on behalf of the construction trades are those already in the trades. This magnifies the significance of the negative quality of life concerns identified by these studies, not just as they affect the composition of the current construction work force, but also as they affect the potential for growing the work force.

3.0 QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

3.1 Top-of-Line Results

3.1.1 Questionnaire Summary

- ✓ Qs 1-12 Construction profile
- ✓ Qs 13-18 Specific jobs and how they got there
- ✓ Qs 19-24 Work history profile
- ✓ Qs 25-30 Motivations, incentives, and barriers
- ✓ Qs 31-35 Expectations for the future, and attitudes
- ✓ Q 36 & 37 Six-fold continuum on quality of life
- ✓ Q 38 Trust and camaraderie
- ✓ Qs 39-43 Demographic markers

3.1.2 Construction Profile

Of those surveyed, 51.4% were in their first job in the trades, 20% were in their second job, and the remainder – some 28% were in their third, fourth, or fifth job or more. Just over half (50.4%) indicated that they had worked full-time in an industry other than construction. At the time of survey, 47.9% were “journeypersons,” 22% were apprentices, 14.7% were “supervisor/superintendent /foreman,” and 9.7% were labourers.

In terms of experience in construction, 4.2% had less than one year’s experience, 21.2% claimed one to five years in construction, 18.6% -- six to ten years, 20.8% -- eleven to twenty years, and 33.4% with twenty-one or more years in construction. Almost one third (32.9%) were under nineteen years of age when they got their starts in construction, 43.5% were nineteen to twenty-four, 10% started at ages 25 to 29, and 12% were thirty years or older.

More than 50% (51.4%) got into construction through family or friends, 17.8% by way of a hiring hall, 10.3% through an employer, 4.7% through a neighbour or a co-worker, and 3.5% responded to an ad.

Over 40% (40.9%) started in industrial construction, 34.4% in “institutional / commercial / high-rise residential”, 21.7% in low-rise residential, and the remainder in civil engineering projects. Previously, 62.5% had worked in industrial construction, 57.8% in “institutional / commercial / high-rise residential,” 45.7% in low-rise residential, 12.6% on civil engineering projects, and 23.4% had previously worked outside construction or their current jobs were their first jobs in construction.

In respect of their histories of union affiliation, 55.9% had “previously been affiliated” with a traditional craft union, 10.8% with an alternative union, 7.3% were open shop, and 37.7% were non-union.

3.1.3 Specific Jobs and How They Got There

At the time of survey, 47.9% claimed the journeyperson designation, 22% were apprentices, 14.7% were supervisors/superintendents/foremen, and the remainder were self-designated as labourers. Of those surveyed, 76.4% had been apprenticed to their particular trades and 53.5% had completed their apprenticeship programs (19.2% were still in their apprenticeship programs).

Some 69.3% were not certified in another trade, 17.2% were certified in one other trade, 6% in two other trades, and the remaining 3.3% in four or more trades altogether. Of those surveyed, 28.9% claimed a Red Seal certification in their present trades and 22.3% claimed some other certification widely dispersed over categories (*compared with 47.3% who were Red Seal certified and 34% who claimed some other certification in Working Mobile, 2005*).

The motivations cited for Red Seal or other certifications were greater employability and steadier work (6.9%), job satisfaction and pride of workmanship (4%), more flexibility on the job (1.9%), and 1.5% cited their reason as a way to avoid working away from home.

3.1.4 Work History Profile

With respect to their work histories, in their first jobs, 15.5% traveled more than 100km each way and 8.4% slept “overnight way from home closer to the job site” for a combined total of 23.9% of those surveyed. In “Job Two,” 14.3% traveled more than 100km and 7.9% slept away from home – 22.2% in total. On “Job Three,” 12.3% traveled in excess of 100km, 6.5% slept away from home for a total of 18.8%.

Over the span of their careers to date, the largest group (30.7%) indicated never working mobile, 24.5% indicated few jobs working mobile, 18.1% indicated “some,” 12.6% said most of their jobs were mobile, 5.8% indicated that all previous jobs were mobile.

During their apprenticeships, 39.7% worked in jobs that required them to work mobile, 34.3% did not, and 15.4% said “not applicable.” Of those who indicated they worked mobile in their apprenticeships, 26.6% said they could readily have found a construction job close to home.

In respect of their current jobs, 16.8% quit their previous jobs to work at their present sites and 68.1% indicated they did not. They found their current jobs by way of a union hiring hall (36.9%), through a friend or a family member or a neighbour (22.1%), via an employer (12.7%), 5.7% through a co-worker, 45.7% through a co-worker, 4.8% responded to an ad, and 5.1% said “other.”

3.1.5 Motivations, Incentives, and Barriers

This survey intentionally focused on those presently working local. However, when asked what factors would affect a decision to leave home for work, 57.4% cited financial incentives, 43.7% indicated if it were the only work available, 34.4% said they would go if they had no choice – if an employer assigned them to the job, 15.1% cited advancing career prospects, 10.3% cited sense of adventure, 7.7% gave family or personal reasons, and 4.8% said “other.”

On the barrier question (Q26), the barriers to working mobile were “family / personal costs” (17.9%), “personal expenses getting/maintaining job” (13.6%), “significant personal expense in dealing with a family/personal commitment or emergency” (13.2%), 5.3% cited qualifications not suitable in another jurisdiction, 2.6% cited pension and benefit transferability, 1.2% gave difficulty in obtaining a travel card, 1.2% cited difficulties with depositing a travel card, and 4.5% said “other.”

When asked if there were barriers that had induced them not to be a mobile worker, 20% cited personal expenses in coping with a family/personal commitment or emergency, 13.1% cited significant personal expenses in getting and maintaining the job, 10.4% said community involvement issues, 3.7% indicated difficulty in using qualifications in other jurisdictions, 2.2% indicated difficulties with pensions and benefits, 1.2% cited difficulties in obtaining and 1.8% pointed to difficulties in depositing a travel card, 5% said “other,” 20% said none of the reasons would change their decision to be a mobile worker, and 28.9% said none of the reasons were applicable.

In respect of the current project on which most were working local, 48.8% expected to work 1-3 years on the project, 11.5% expected to work 7-11 months, 9.4% said 4-6 months, 8.3% indicated 1-3 months, 3.4% -- 1-3 weeks, and 4.1% said they expected to work 1-4 days more on a current project. Most sites at which data was collected were major institutional or industrial projects spread across Canada’s major cities, selected in order to provide a data set with a comparable skill-set to what compiled on major, remote, industrial projects. The major variance to the earlier study was our expectation of finding “local” rather than “mobile” workers.

Among those who had worked mobile, 51.1% indicated that all or a portion of their travel costs had been covered by others, and 48.8% said that all or a portion of their room and board costs had been covered. 19.9% said their employers had offered a travel incentive to commute to their current job.

3.1.6 Expectations for the Future, and Attitudes

When asked whether or not they expected to work away from home for their next job, 12.4% said they did expect to, 37.1% said “no,” and 40.7% responded, “don’t know.”

As to whether or not they wanted to work mobile on their next jobs, 54.8% said “no,” 29% said “don’t know,” and 9.5% indicated they wanted to work mobile on the next job. When asked if they would ever again work mobile, 33.5% said “no,” 31.5% said “don’t know,” and 27.8% said they wanted to work mobile.

Asked if they would take a break after working mobile, 34.9% indicated this was “not applicable,” 33.3% said they would not take a break, and 21% indicated they would take a break. Upon learning that they would be working mobile on a major project within a month, 63.3% indicated they would continue working up till departure for the project, 2.1% would quit their present job immediately, 3.4% would turn down other work if it overlapped, 2.6% would turn down any other work, and 4.3% said they would not look for other work even if they were unemployed.

3.1.7 Six-fold Continuum on Quality of Life

In respect of how working in construction contributed to their quality of life, on a scale of one (most negative) to five (most positive):

<i>Canada</i>	<i>Negative</i>					<i>Positive</i>					
	<i>Scale</i>	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Pride in a major project		2.1%	2.5%	16.1%	32.5%	46.8%					
Job satisfaction		1.6%	3.3%	18.8%	38.3%	38.1%					
Camaraderie		2.0%	5.4%	25.2%	37.8%	29.6%					
Marriage		13.1%	12.6%	31.1%	24%	19.1%					
Family		8.3%	13%	29.3%	27.4%	21.9%					
Community involvement		14.6%	16.8%	36.6%	19.1%	12.9%					

<i>Atlantic</i>	<i>Negative</i>					<i>Positive</i>				
	<i>Scale</i>	1	2	3	4	5				
Pride in a major project		1.6%	3.2%	24%	28%	43.2%				
Job satisfaction		0.8%	5.1%	19.5%	33.1%	38.5%				
Camaraderie		2.6%	6.1%	26.1%	32.2%	33%				
Marriage		5.2%	15.5%	28.4%	24.1%	26.7%				
Family		6.7%	14.2%	20%	26.7%	32.5%				
Community involvement		9.3%	19.5%	33.1%	22.9%	15.3%				

<i>Quebec</i>	<i>Negative</i>					<i>Positive</i>				
	<i>Scale</i>	1	2	3	4	5				
Pride in a major project		4.7%	1%	8.3%	27.6%	58.3%				
Job satisfaction		2.2%	0.5%	7.1%	33%	57.1%				
Camaraderie		1.6%	4.4%	16.4%	35%	42.6%				
Marriage		19.2%	13%	31.1%	20.3%	16.4%				
Family		10.6%	13.4%	29.6%	24%	22.3%				
Community involvement		10.8%	13.1%	33%	26.1%	17%				

<i>Ontario</i>	<i>Negative</i>					<i>Positive</i>				
	<i>Scale</i>	1	2	3	4	5				
Pride in a major project		1.7%	2%	14.5%	35.7%	46.1%				
Job satisfaction		1.2%	3.5%	16.1%	42.4%	36.9%				
Camaraderie		1.5%	5.5%	27.4%	38.9%	26.7%				
Marriage		10.5%	11.1%	32.1%	28.9%	17.1%				
Family		4.5%	12.1%	29.6%	32.6%	20.8%				
Community involvement		12.8%	16.4%	37.8%	20.8%	12.2%				

<i>Prairies</i>	<i>Negative</i>					<i>Positive</i>				
	<i>Scale</i>	1	2	3	4	5				
Pride in a major project		2.1%	5%	20.7%	36.9%	35.3%				
Job satisfaction		2.9%	5.3%	28%	41.2%	22.6%				
Camaraderie		3.9%	8.7%	30.7%	35.9%	20.8%				
Marriage		15.2%	16.7%	31%	21%	16.2%				
Family		10.6%	18.9%	29.5%	23.3%	17.6%				
Community involvement		21.9%	23.2%	36.1%	9%	9.9%				

<i>British Columbia</i>	<i>Negative</i>					<i>Positive</i>				
	<i>Scale</i>	1	2	3	4	5				
Pride in a major project		0.6%	1.1%	15.6%	29.1%	53.6%				
Job satisfaction		0.6%	1.7%	23%	35.4%	39.3%				
Camaraderie		0.6%	1.2%	22.4%	45.3%	30.6%				
Marriage		14.6%	7.6%	31.6%	22.2%	24.1%				
Family		11.5%	5.2%	34.5%	27%	21.8%				
Community involvement		15.8%	10.5%	41.5%	19.9%	12.3%				

Those who had worked away from home were asked, on a similar scale, to indicate how working mobile had affected their quality of life:

<i>Canada</i>	<i>Negative</i>					<i>Positive</i>				
	<i>Scale</i>	1	2	3	4	5				
Pride in a major project		4.6%	5.4%	23.4%	29.7%	36.7%				
Job satisfaction		4.3%	6.5%	25.6%	33%	30.6%				
Camaraderie		5.2%	8.9%	30.9%	32.6%	22.4%				
Marriage		24.5%	27.2%	29.5%	10.7%	8.1%				
Family		22.7%	26.3%	29.4%	12.3%	9.3%				
Community involvement		30.3%	22.9%	27.3%	11.2%	8.3%				

<i>Atlantic</i>	<i>Negative</i>					<i>Positive</i>
	<i>Scale</i>	1	2	3	4	5
Pride in a major project	4.8%	4.8%	33.3%	26.2%	31%	
Job satisfaction	3.9%	5.2%	36.4%	23.4%	31.2%	
Camaraderie	2.6%	9.2%	35.5%	32.9%	19.7%	
Marriage	21.9%	20.5%	34.2%	13.7%	9.6%	
Family	25.6%	19.2%	30.8%	15.4%	9%	
Community involvement	35.9%	24.4%	24.4%	11.5%	3.8%	

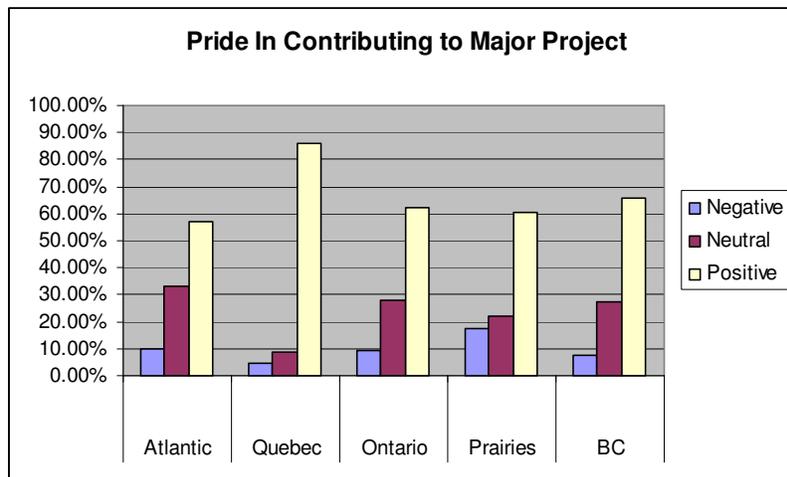
<i>Quebec</i>	<i>Negative</i>					<i>Positive</i>
	<i>Scale</i>	1	2	3	4	5
Pride in a major project	3.4%	1.4%	9%	29%	57.2%	
Job satisfaction	2.8%	1.4%	9.7%	37.5%	48.6%	
Camaraderie	2.9%	4.3%	21.4%	37.9%	33.6%	
Marriage	22.6%	18.2%	33.6%	14.6%	15.3%	
Family	15.5%	21.8%	28.9%	19.7%	14.1%	
Community involvement	16.5%	19.4%	26.6%	20.9%	16.5%	

<i>Ontario</i>	<i>Negative</i>					<i>Positive</i>
	<i>Scale</i>	1	2	3	4	5
Pride in a major project	3.4%	6%	27.8%	28.2%	34.2%	
Job satisfaction	3%	6.5%	30.2%	29.7%	30.6%	
Camaraderie	3.2%	8.6%	33.3%	30.6%	24.3%	
Marriage	19.5%	30%	31.4%	11.4%	7.7%	
Family	18.3%	27%	33.9%	12.2%	8.7%	
Community involvement	28.8%	22.6%	30.1%	13.7%	4.9%	

<i>Prairies</i>	Scale	Negative			Positive	
		1	2	3	4	5
Pride in a major project		6.7%	10.6%	22.2%	36.1%	24.4%
Job satisfaction		6.8%	11.9%	27.1%	37.3%	16.9%
Camaraderie		11.3%	12.5%	31.5%	29.8%	14.9%
Marriage		29%	36.9%	19.1%	5.6%	7.4%
Family		31.8%	35.8%	20.8%	4.6%	6.9%
Community involvement		41.1	28%	21.7%	2.9%	6.3%

<i>British Columbia</i>	Scale	Negative			Positive	
		1	2	3	4	5
Pride in a major project		5.5%	1.8%	27.3%	26.4%	39.1%
Job satisfaction		5.5%	5.5%	26.6%	33.9%	28.4%
Camaraderie		4.8%	9.5%	34.3%	34.3%	17.1%
Marriage		32.3%	19.2%	33.3%	10.1%	5.1%
Family		25%	20.4%	33.3%	13%	8.3%
Community involvement		29.8%	18.3%	33.7%	6.7%	11.5%

The regional differences within this data cannot go unnoticed. When workers rank on a scale of '1' to '5' in response to the question, "How has working in construction affected your quality of life?" in various categories, there is an almost thirty-percentage-point gap between the responses from region to region.



Even more notable is a comparison of results within each region between the responses of that subset of approximately 20% who are considered “regular mobile workers” and the overall sample. In every region there is a gap as expected, with the overall sample responding more positively than mobile workers. In Quebec, there is no statistical gap. While caution needs to be exercised given the relatively small sample sizes that the “regular mobile” workers in a given region represent, the data is definitive enough to warrant paying attention to these differences.

	Neg	Neutral	Pos
Canada	-2.20%	-0.20%	29.60%
Atlantic	-4.80%	-9.30%	14.00%
Quebec	0.90%	-0.70%	-0.30%
Ontario	-5.70%	-13.30%	19.40%
Prairies	-10.20%	-1.50%	11.70%
B.C.	-5.60%	-11.70%	17.20%

Although the gaps in other measures (job satisfaction, camaraderie, marriage, family, and community involvement) are not quite as stark and taken by themselves, not reliable statistically, the same pattern does appear to show itself in each of the six measures. There is a much smaller gap between the Quebec mobile and local workers than those in other regions.

Job Satisfaction

	Neg	Neutral	Pos
Canada	-5.40%	-7.30%	12.90%
Atlantic	-4.80%	-9.30%	14.00%
Quebec	-1.50%	-2.60%	4.00%
Ontario	-4.80%	-14.10%	19.00%
Prairies	-10.50%	0.90%	9.60%
BC	-8.70%	-3.60%	12.40%

3.1.8 Trust and Camaraderie

Finally, when asked if where co-workers or friends plan to work influences how one chooses the next job, 72.7% said “no,” and 18.4% indicated this did factor

into the decision. Of those who answered “yes” (that co-workers and friends did influence), 5.7% cited “safety” as the reason while 10% cited camaraderie.

3.1.9 Demographic Markers

Of those surveyed:

- ✓ 21.4% were 50 years of age or older,
- ✓ 44.5% were aged from 30 to 49 years, and
- ✓ 24.9% were under the age of 30 years;

- ✓ 88.6% indicated “male;”
- ✓ 1.8% indicated they were “female,” and
- ✓ 9.6% of the questionnaires had no response to this question;

- ✓ 56.3% were married or “common law,”
- ✓ 9.7% were separated or divorced,
- ✓ 0.6% were widowed, and
- ✓ 21.7% were “single.”

For 72.1%, English was their first language and for 16.3% French was their first language, while 3.6% indicated another language was their first. When asked if they were conversant in any other official or non-official language, 20.7% said “English,” 7.7% answered “French,” 5.5% said “other,” and 54.4% answered “none.”

If we were to develop an archetype, the local worker is male, aged 30 to 49 years. He is a member of a traditional craft union and completed his apprenticeship in his trade which he pursues mainly on industrial construction sites. He is married and he believes that working in construction has a strong, net positive impact on his marriage and family. However, he mainly works locally. When he works mobile, this has a net-negative impact on his marriage and family. His motivation for working mobile is for financial reasons, but the personal expenses incurred on the job site and at home because of his working mobile are a significant barrier to his working mobile in future. This archetype of the local worker is virtually indistinguishable from the profile of the mobile worker, except in respect of the impacts his working in construction has on his quality of life, including marriage, family, and community life.

3.2 Analysis of Results

In follow-up to earlier research reported in *Working Mobile: A Study of Labour Mobility in Canada's Industrial Construction Sector* (2005), we highlight findings from our research those who work locally. Further, we draw attention to points of comparison where there is a statistically significant point of divergence between those who work locally and those who work mobile.

3.2.1 Why Work Mobile? Why Work Local?

The job histories (Q19) of those we surveyed is consistent with their reporting themselves as working mobile “all,” “most,” “some,” “few,” or on “none” of their jobs (Q20). Labourers were more likely to choose to work mobile (Q12 and Q25) than journeypersons, apprentices, or supervisors-foreman. Labourers were also most likely to go mobile as only available work. In the quantitative research, we found no significant differences in willingness to work mobile or even entertain the possibility among broad demographic groupings by age (under age 30, from 30 to 49, and 50 years of age and older).

3.2.2 Apprentices and Willingness to Work Mobile

The subset of some apprentices (23.5% of questionnaires received) is skewed by the inclusion of Mohawk College where approximately half of the apprentice questionnaires were obtained. However, the large number of apprentice questionnaires does allow for some helpful comparisons regarding factors for working mobile (Q25) between apprentices and the “global” sample:

Reasons for working mobile	Apprentices	“Global”
Financial incentives	96.8%	91.7%
Sense of adventure	59.6%	42.3%
Advance career prospects	79.7%	55%
Personal or family reasons	50.9%	25.1%

There was virtually no difference between apprentices and the global results if they had “no choice” or it were the only available work. When asked whether they wanted to work mobile on the next job (Q32) or if they ever wanted to work mobile (Q33), there was also virtually no difference between apprentices and the sample taken as a whole.

3.2.3 What We Know About the Mobile Worker

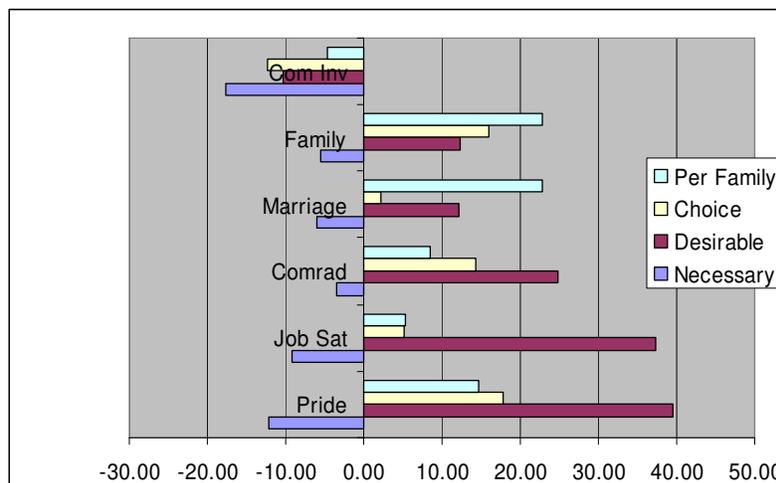
The mobile worker is most likely to have started in the (construction) sector in industrial construction. In *Working Mobile* (2005) for which 60% of our sample we identified as “regular mobile,” 86.1% of these found their first job in industrial construction. To this we add the proviso that our samples were taken at industrial construction sites. In the current research done in 2006, the questionnaires were administered to a mix of industrial and large commercial/institutional sites. In this latter sample, 21% identified themselves as “regular mobile,” and 89.4% of these started in industrial construction. This latter result tends to confirm our earlier conclusion that those who ordinarily work mobile got their starts with industrial construction.

3.2.4 Necessity, Choice, and Desire

In addition to developing a profile of the mobile worker, our objectives were to identify factors influencing the decision to be a mobile worker, the obstacles and barriers faced by mobile workers, and the impacts experienced by mobile workers with respect to their quality of life.

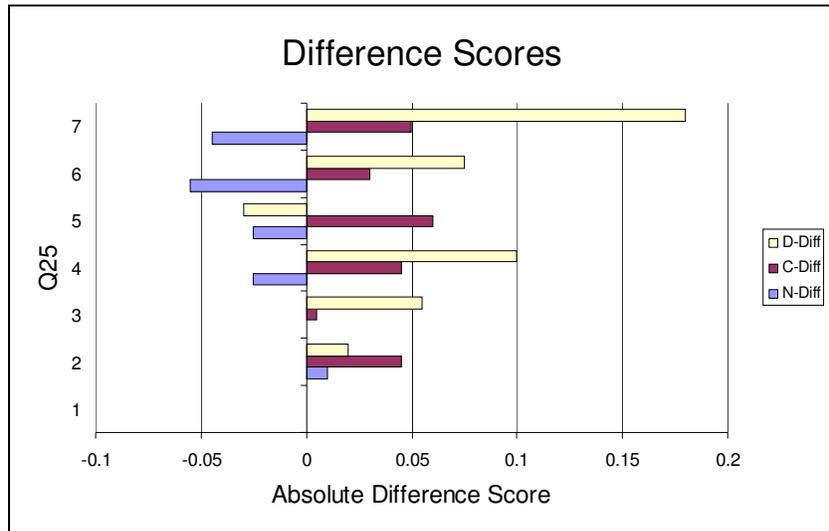
What is the perceived impact of working mobile in terms of quality of life? In *Working Mobile* (2005), obvious patterns emerged. Those who worked mobile due to necessity reported negative quality-of-life ratings in every category significantly more than the other two groups. Workers who indicated that working mobile was desirable for their careers were the most positive in work-related categories of life satisfaction (camaraderie, job satisfaction, and pride) and were more positive than the overall group in terms of personal categories (marriage and family). All categories of workers indicated strong ‘negatives’ with respect to the impact on their community involvements.

Working Mobile (2005)



The results of our most recent research² are very similar to the results reported in *Working Mobile*. When workers “go mobile” of necessity versus out of choice or desire, the perceived impact on community involvement, family, marriage, camaraderie, job satisfaction, or pride is negative, without exception.

Working Local (2007)



3.2.5 Other Points of Comparison Between Analysis in *Working Mobile* and *Working Local*

Like our comparison in respect of “necessity, choice, and desire,” our findings on the other points of analysis in this iteration of research for *Working Local* was virtually indistinguishable from our findings reported in *Working Mobile*:

- As with *Working Mobile*, we found a sub-set of workers in construction who ordinarily work mobile – “regular mobile.” These are workers who are primarily involved in industrial construction – this is generally the nature of industrial construction projects, that it requires large numbers of skilled tradesman for defined periods of time, and there is a limited pool of journeypersons certified in the trades associated with industrial construction;
- As with *Working Mobile*, certification or the ability to obtain and place a travel card were not significant obstacles to working mobile. However, the consequences to marriage, family, and community involvement were significantly higher among those working local. Among those working

² Although the scales on the two graphs differ due to the use of a different software program for analysis, the “negatives” relative the “positives” do not.

local as with those working mobile, the main incentives to work mobile were financial; and

- There were few differences among the results in respect of age and willingness to work mobile, again as with what we reported in *Working Mobile*. Nor were there statistically significant differences from one type of labour organization to another in respect of willingness or attitudes toward working mobile.

4.0 QUALITATIVE RESULTS

In the following we will describe the settings and compositions of the groups, the demographic differences between them, and common themes that surfaced in the focus group discussions.

4.1 Settings and Compositions of the Focus Groups

Five focus groups were convened in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Mississauga, Ontario, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Grande Prairie, Alberta, and New Westminster, British Columbia. All participants were then working locally, across the industrial construction trades. There were demographic variables across the groups which tend to explain certain emphases from group to group, but the overall demographic profile roughly approximated the demographic markers of the earlier quantitative sampling:

- ✓ The Halifax group had a median age of about forty-five years, and were mostly married with children still at home or “empty nesters”;
- ✓ The Mississauga group had a median age of about fifty years – again, mostly married empty nesters;
- ✓ The Winnipeg group was more demographically diverse with a median age of about forty years, mostly married with children at home;
- ✓ The Grande Prairie group had a median age of about thirty-five years, married with young children; and
- ✓ The New Westminster group had a median age of about fifty years, mostly married with grown children.

The Grande Prairie group convened at a hotel conference room, the New Westminster group met at a regional union headquarters, and the rest were held at union local halls. In all cases, pizza and soft drinks were provided. Ray Pennings led four of the focus group discussions along the lines of the outline included as an appendix and Russ Kuykendall transcribed a representative sample of responses and remarks on a notebook computer. The Halifax group was led by Russ Kuykendall with Dan Postma’s transcribing.

4.2 Differences of Emphasis

The Halifax group was mainly electrical workers who were involved in maintenance work in large, commercial facilities, and 80% of them had never worked mobile. The Mississauga groups were ironworkers working in large commercial construction in Toronto – again, most had not worked mobile. The Winnipeg group were a mix of carpenters and electricians presently working local in large commercial construction. About half of the Winnipeggers had worked mobile previously. The Grande Prairie

group was composed of workers who mostly worked local to the Grande Prairie district. About half had moved from elsewhere to Grande Prairie. The New Westminister group was mainly electricians who worked in industrial and large commercial construction.

The Halifax, Winnipeg, Mississauga, and New Westminister groups had overarching concerns with respect for their trades, and the need for high school teachers and guidance counsellors to respect the trades in their encouraging high school students to consider the trades in their career choices. Respect for the trades did not even come up in the Grande Prairie group.

However, the Grande Prairie group was concerned about the lack of respect accorded their community by mobile workers – that Grande Prairie was seen merely as a place to make some cash, and not a place in which to raise a family and build a community. Most participants in the Halifax and Winnipeg groups were committed to staying in the Halifax or Winnipeg areas to raise their families and build their communities – there was a strong sense of community pride, in both cases, not unlike what we found in Grande Prairie. Community pride did not figure into either of the Mississauga or New Westminister group.

There was a high level of cynicism in the Winnipeg and New Westminister groups – toward government, toward certifications from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and toward retirement benefits.

4.3 Common Themes

As an aggregate, the focus groups surfaced four over-riding, common themes:

1. As with our earlier study, it was clear that a majority of mobile workers constitute a subset who consistently work mobile;
2. This majority subset work mobile out of necessity. Those who work local would only work mobile if there were no local option available to them to earn a living wage;
3. Those who work locally are generally more positive in their attitudes to working in construction. This only serves to heighten that the regularly mobile worker experiences a significantly lower and more negative quality of life compared to other workers in industrial and large, commercial construction;
4. In *Working Mobile* (2005), we found that mobile workers are characterized by significant negative self-esteem and concern about their social status vis à vis the communities in which they work mobile and in respect of other lines of work. But this concern for respect extends to those working local in respect of the

respect generally accorded the trades compared to the respect for careers requiring a university education; and

5. Most participants were recruited into the trades by family and friends – especially, by their fathers who were in the trades.

Most participants would only even consider working mobile out of financial necessity. They acknowledge that working mobile is more lucrative, particularly in respect of the LOA – as high as \$2500 per month in Alberta, but even this financial inducement was insufficient to attract local workers unless they could no longer find work locally.

Related to quality of life issues, comments were virtually unanimous as to the detriment of working mobile to marriage, family, and community. These were generally seen as insurmountable barriers to working mobile, absent necessity. When it came to marriage, across the focus groups there seemed to be a lower rate of divorce than among mobile workers. In fact, concerns about marriage and family did not figure nearly as prominently in this round of focus groups – who were mainly working locally – than among the last round of focus groups whose participants were working mobile.

When it came to parenting, there was little to no voicing of concerns for their children. In the last round of focus groups for *Working Mobile*, we heard concerns consistently expressed about the impact of their absences from their families on their children and on the spouse left to parent alone. Nor did concerns about extended family and caring for parents arise among these groups as they did last time with those presently working mobile.

Community involvement and community pride was frequently mentioned as a barrier to leaving their home communities in order to work mobile. Participation in intramural sports was common, but more common was taking children to participate in organized sports. One participant in the Grande Prairie group indicated a number of those they knew who were working mobile, there, joined local softball leagues.

When asked about their attitudes toward working mobile and living in camps, their attitudes were not as negative toward them as among those we spoke to last time, who had worked out of camps. This suggests that to work mobile while living in a camp is to find it a very negative experience.

As among mobile workers, camaraderie and trust (safety) figured into their quality of life on the job. Further, the commitment of contractors to job site safety would attract or repel participants from working on projects. Participants

indicated that some contractors have very strong reputations and others very poor reputations in respect of their commitments to and practice of safety.

In common with the earlier round of focus groups in *Working Mobile*, there was a desire for the ability to claim tax benefits from the amortization costs of equipment and clothing, education costs, and certification costs necessary to working on projects in the trades.

What figured especially prominently was a concern for recruiting, educating, and training the next generation of workers in the construction trades. A recurring theme in this aspect of focus group discussions was the lack of respect accorded the trades by teachers, guidance counselors, by parents, and the lack of public respect given the trades in Canadian society. Although television and other advertising on behalf of the trades was mentioned positively, the need was emphasized for finding ways to increase the respect for and profile of the construction trades.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Quantitative

To recapitulate, this study sought to develop a profile of the local worker in industrial construction for purposes of analytical comparison with the mobile worker. The study seeks to identify the local worker's motivations and incentives for moving to major work sites – economic necessity or economic payoff, career enhancement, quality of life, or a life-style choice; to identify major obstacles to mobility; and to add demographic particulars that will contribute to the development of the profile of the mobile worker.

As with mobile workers, key motivations for working mobile are “financial incentives” and “only work available.” As among mobile workers, no significant barriers to mobile work related to certification, transferring pension and benefits, and to the travel card were found. However, for local workers, the quality-of-life barriers are very nearly insurmountable. Only financial necessity is a sufficient inducement to work mobile, particularly necessity brought on by the inability to find work locally.

We confirmed among those we surveyed were then working local that there is a subset of workers – mobile workers – in industrial construction who move from job site to job site. The general attitude toward working mobile among those who work locally is very negative.

If we were to develop an archetype, the local worker is male, aged 30 to 49 years. He is a member of a traditional craft union and completed his apprenticeship in his trade which he pursues mainly on industrial construction sites. He is married and he believes that working in construction has a strong, net positive impact on his marriage and family. However, he mainly works locally. When he works mobile, this has a net-negative impact on his marriage and family. His motivation for working mobile is for financial reasons, but the personal expenses incurred on the job site and at home because of his working mobile are a significant barrier to his working mobile in future. This archetype of the local worker is virtually indistinguishable from the profile of the mobile worker, except in respect of the impacts his working in construction has on his quality of life, including marriage, family, and community life.



5.2 Qualitative

In most of the focus groups, participants were concerned about respect for the trades – among teachers and guidance councilors, among family members not in the trades, and in the wider, Canadian society. There was a very strongly held perception that the trades are not accorded the respect given careers for which university education is a prerequisite. This was a situation participants felt should be corrected – that teachers and guidance councilors and parents should encourage youth to consider entering the construction trades. Most participants had been recruited into the trades by a friend or family member already working in the trades. This is clearly significant for recruitment strategies into the industrial construction trades.

Further, as in the quantitative results, financial necessity was the one inducement generally considered strong enough to lead workers to overcome the obstacles of the negative consequences from working mobile for marriage, family, and community involvement. Among these workers – mostly working local – community involvement was a significant barrier to working mobile, though not as strong a barrier as marriage and family.

APPENDIX: FOCUS GROUP OUTLINE

Introduction

Administer Questionnaire

Icebreaker (15 minutes)

Let's start by going around the table. Perhaps you might share with us how you got into the construction industry. What was your first construction job? How old were you at the time? How did you find out about that job?

Focused discussion (75 minutes)

1. First time working mobile?
 - a. Describe as regular/ occasional/ rare?
 - b. How do you decide to work mobile vs. local?
 - c. Obstacles? Personal expenses?
2. Move between provinces? Between sectors? Between labour org types? Similarities/differences
3. Best part of working mobile?
4. Worst part of working mobile?
5. How is working mobile different from local work?
6. How has working mobile "impacted":
 - a. Marriage and Family
 - b. Involvement with your community
 - c. Job satisfaction, and pride in your trade and projects worked on
 - d. Your relationship with co-workers
 - e. Other
7. Change of attitudes toward working mobile over time? Sense of adventure with respect to working mobile declines?
8. Greatest incentive that could be offered to make you work mobile?

9. Greatest incentive that would entice others to work mobile?
 10. What do you anticipate as your career path?
 11. Home emergencies working mobile? How responded to?
 12. What would you change about working mobile?
 13. Would you recommend working mobile to your kids?
 14. Anything else you would like to add?
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