LABOUR MOBILITY OF BUILDING GRADUATES IN SINGAPORE

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Abstract
This study investigates the mobility of building graduates from the Department of Building, National University of Singapore, and the factors influencing them to remain or leave the construction industry. Labour mobility refers to occupational mobility and job change. A survey was conducted on a sample of 197 graduates from 1972 to 1999 in November 2001 using questionnaires through telephone interview and email. Graduates from 2000 and 2001 were excluded because they have just entered the job market. Building graduates from overseas universities working in Singapore were also excluded due to the lack of data. Logistic regression was then used to identify the factors affecting graduates’ decision to stay or leave the construction industry. The results show that working hours, reputation of company, prospects of industry, family commitments, and personal interest are the main factors affecting their choices.

Keywords
labour mobility, residual labour, learning by doing, logistic regression

INTRODUCTION
This paper examines the mobility of BSc.(Building) graduates and investigates why they choose to remain or leave the construction industry. Since the formation of the Department of Building at the National University of Singapore (NUS) in 1968, the number of graduates has increased steadily from less than 15 in 1972 to about 100 annually in recent years. Mobility is likely to be high because the image of the industry as 3Ds (Dirty, Demanding and Dangerous) has not improved. Lately, another ‘D’ has been added, namely, the dismal performance of the construction industry relative to the rest of the economy.

High labour mobility in terms of job change (internal to the industry) and occupational change (external to the industry) impacts both positively and negatively on the construction sector. On the positive side, the opportunity to change jobs or occupation provides structural flexibility to labour markets in terms of numerical and wage adjustments during periods of booms and busts. On a personal level, workers may change jobs or occupation for a variety of reasons to be discussed in this paper.

On the negative side, it has long been argued that the construction sector receives residual labour because of cyclical fluctuations and this affects productivity since few workers and professionals who left the industry return during construction booms (Guttentag, 1961). This implies that the construction industry loses out on valuable worker experience, skills, and training costs. Partly for this reason, learning by doing has been found to be insignificant in the Singapore construction industry (Tan and Elias, 2000). If labour mobility is high, workers are less able to improve productivity purely from production experience, that is, to ‘learn by doing’.