



The COVID-19 Crisis and the impacts on the profession of Chartered Engineering Consultants

1. Compensating COVID-19 related extra efforts

Digitalisation is a major factor in the daily professional lives of Chartered Engineers, therefore to continue working during the crisis with home-office-based employees is a matter of course. This is essential for the economic restart after the shutdown. The work of Chartered Engineers is a basis for any form of project planning and construction work after the crisis. In order to provide the basis for the continuation of construction projects, Chartered Engineers take risks for themselves and their employees in the interest of society.

But, of course not even the use of advanced technology can fully prevent that the performance of Chartered Engineers is hindered by the crisis. As authorities and clients also have to face work obstructions, deadlines cannot be met, etc.

All this leads to considerable extra efforts that were not foreseen and are not regulated in the contracts. It is necessary to clarify that Chartered Engineers shall not carry the costs for the extra efforts based on the COVID-19 crisis all on their own.

2. Retaining highly qualified personnel

It already became clear during the financial crisis in 2008 that Chartered Engineers are an important pillar of economy and reliable employers. This will also be proven during and after the COVID-19 crisis. Employees in Chartered Engineering companies are mainly highly qualified and experienced professionals that cannot be substituted easily. Terminating employees' contracts therefore needs to be avoided even in cases of a temporary decline in projects due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

Support measures – such as the possibility for “short-time work” that is currently implemented in many EU countries and partly covers personnel costs for a limited duration of time – against the termination of employment contracts are important. It has to be guaranteed that such measures are also open to Chartered Engineers and their employees.

3. Drawing the right conclusions from the crisis

Liberal professionals such as medical doctors and Chartered Engineers play a major role in overcoming this crisis in regard to both the health and the economic aspect. It became very obvious, that systemically important medical, engineering and other professions are the essential pillar of overcoming the COVID-19 crisis and also how much our society depends on their professional knowledge and expertise.

In many areas – from medical technology and infrastructure to AI applications and strategic calculation mechanisms - medical approaches rely on engineering excellence. Apart from direct medical applications Chartered Engineers play an important role in keeping up the communication and infrastructure systems that are a basis for the current digitalisation boost that enables economic activities in a shutdown situation.

The COVID-19 crisis once again shows the important role of liberal professions for health, safety, and welfare. The longstanding European Commissions' deregulation approach in broad areas of policy now shows its weaknesses and limitations in full force. It became very obvious that the market cannot fix everything and that excellence based on high qualification is an indispensable resource when challenging a crisis. It is absolutely necessary for the European Union to re-think its approach to national professional regulation. Risking the quality of systemically important liberal professional services because of controversial economic beliefs in the impacts of deregulatory measures must stop immediately. Europe is a knowledge-based society that needs to enhance and not diminish medical as well as engineering excellence.