Narratives of Practice: Making Sense of Engineering Work

Abstract: A growing body of evidence suggests persistent gaps between what engineering students learn in the classroom versus the realities they face when they enter the workforce. Yet even as our understanding of engineering teaching and learning continues to expand, there remains a surprising lack of empirical research on engineering practice. This presentation introduces an evolving research program focused on the job expectations and day-to-day realities of engineers at work, with special emphasis placed on global/international and early career experiences. Empirical evidence from multiple projects is used to highlight themes such as challenges associated with the school-to-work transition, the emotional and psychological dimensions of professional life, the sociotechnical nature of engineering, and boundary spanning as a frame for studying practice.