**HALIJAH ENGINEERS HER DREAM CAREER**

**Halijah Idris has come a long way in her pursuit of a career in construction. In 2023, she relocated from Malaysia to the UK to take up her current position as a formwork design engineer at Doka's Sittingbourne site. This Q&A provides an enlightening insight into the challenges Halijah’s faced in achieving her professional goal.**

**Tell us about your background and what led you to choose a career in engineering.**

When I was 17, I got really excited about the booming construction industry in my country (Malaysia) and the opportunities it presented. Engineering jobs were really popular amongst boys, but my parents encouraged me to prove that girls could also do them. I have five sisters, none of whom are interested in construction. So, I think my parents were quite proud that I did something different by becoming an engineer.

**What was your first job as a qualified engineer, and how was it for you as a woman?**   
After graduating as an engineer at Swansea University, I returned home to Malaysia to begin my career journey as a Technical Field Engineer. It wasn’t easy as I encountered some discrimination from operatives who thought sites work was for men only. But I didn’t let it put me off the industry.

**How did you transition to Formwork Design Engineer?**

I found the formwork side of the industry more to my liking after working on site and meeting people from other companies who worked in the sector. The transition offered more scope for technical design work. Formwork design allows me to see a project through the initial phase as it progresses to the end. It’s a rewarding job once the project is finished and open to public for use.

**Have you seen a positive change in attitudes towards women in the construction industry?**In the seven years I’ve been working in the sector I’ve seen a huge shift in attitudes. Nowadays, everyone is more understanding and respectful of each other. This is an extremely positive outcome for future generations of female construction workers.

**What’s inspired that positive attitude change?**

Companies have become far more aware of the benefits a diverse workforce brings. A variety of backgrounds and cultures bring a better balance, inspire different ideas and greater creativity. There is more of a focus throughout the construction industry to recruit more female staff across all areas. Engagement with schools and colleges is helping to raise awareness of the benefits of a career in building. Doka is particularly proactive in this area. They are collaborating with schools and places of Further Education so people like myself can talk to students and highlight how women can progress in the construction industry.

**Does the building industry lack female role models?**There are a lot of female lecturers teaching engineering modules that include technical design. But that doesn’t seem to be enough to encourage more female recruits. We need to make engineering more appealing to younger people in general. Maybe it’s because they think it’s too hard, that mastering the software and all the study time it entails is beyond them. And yes, engineering is hard; it takes real commitment and understanding to learn and put into practice. But anything of value takes time to master, and a career in engineering is a very valuable thing to ascertain, regardless of gender.

**What advice would you give to women who are considering a career in engineering?**

To achieve anything in life, you have to push yourself and believe in yourself. Don’t let anybody say that you’re not good enough. For me, it was about ignoring people who said I wasn’t meant to be in engineering, whether working in an office or on site. In my opinion, as long as you have encouragement and support from co-workers, are able to multitask and show real determination, you will succeed in what avenue you choose. Just do it!

**What challenges does your role as Design Engineer present?**The biggest challenge is overcoming limitations in formwork design. In such cases, you have to put your thinking cap on to come up with a solution that is safe and eliminates risk of accidents. Initial building phases require a lot of earthworks. So, when site space is limited, I have to consider things such as in-and-out lorry access and material storage. In terms of formwork, we have to consider how and where the concrete will be poured and what type is being used. The concrete’s pressure requirement also needs accounting for. Most of this information comes from the client. Exchanging ideas with colleagues can inspire a solution, which is one of the benefits of teamwork. I’m sometimes reluctant to voice my ideas – I worry they might not be good enough, but my thought process in overcoming a problem is often praised.

**Which building project stands out as being particularly exciting to work on?**   
In Malaysia, I worked on a project that involved the building of a shopping mall inside the country’s landmark TRX Tower. It was on behalf of an Australian company and included a lot of regulations and safety requirements. I designed the formwork for the mall’s parking basement – from ramp requirements to the roof. I visited the shopping mall when I went home last year. It was so cool to be able to tell people I’d contributed to aspects of its design.

**Can you highlight any inspiring UK projects?**

At Doka, I’m proud to have worked on plenty of great projects including a new hospital in London. I’ve implemented formwork design for lots of low to mid-rise, commercial and residential buildings. My current focus is producing 3D drawings of consistent quality to maintain industry demand.

**Ends.**

**About Doka**

Doka is a world leader in innovative formwork, solutions, and services in all areas of construction. The company is also a global supplier of well-thought-out scaffolding solutions for a varied spectrum of applications. With more than 180 sales and logistics facilities in over 58 countries, Doka has a high-performing distribution network for advice, customer service and technical support on the spot and ensures that equipment is swiftly provided – no matter how big and complex the project. Doka employs 9,000 people worldwide and is a company of the Umdasch Group, which has stood for reliability, experience, and trustworthiness for more than 150 years.

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