



UK oil and gas workers facing job loss: are they experiencing a Just Transition?

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Study background

- **Context:**

- UK oil and gas industry
- Declining hydrocarbon reserves in the North Sea; net zero transition
- Significant job losses due to industry downturns in 2016 and 2020
- Highly skilled oil and gas workers may find themselves at a disadvantage in the job market as fossil fuel extraction declines
- Calls for a 'just' transition that leaves no-one behind (Barry, 2019), including trade union and Scottish government efforts
- Industry aspirations for workers to have 'all-energy careers'

- **Relevant literature**

- Growing literature on Just Transition (Barry, 2019; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013; see reviews by García-García et al., 2020; Wang & Lo, 2021; Pai et al., 2020; Carley & Konisky, 2020)
- Small body of qualitative literature exploring fossil fuel workers' views and experiences of energy transition (e.g. Olson-Hazboun, 2018; Graff et al., 2018; Banerjee & Schuitema, 2022; Cha et al., 2022; MacNeil & Beauman, 2022; Sicotte et al., 2022; Carley et al., 2018)
- Theories of factors influencing access to reemployment (e.g. Brouwer et al., 2015; Wanberg et al., 1999; McArdle et al., 2007; Solove et al., 2015; Vinokur & Schul, 2002; Thompson et al., 2017; Wanberg et al., 2020; Kanfer; Wanberg & Katrowitz, 2001; van Hoye et al., 2015; Latack et al., 1995; van Hooft et al., 2021)



Research questions and methodology

Overarching research aim: exploring the reality of a *Just Transition* operationalised as 're-employment success' (Wanberg, 2012, p377), as experienced by workers facing job loss from the UK oil and gas industry

RQ1: What contextual factors of the UK oil and gas industry influence access to reemployment for workers following job loss?

RQ2: In this context, what factors enable individuals to find re-employment?

Study design and process:

- Qualitative design
- Unit of analysis: Individual workers
- Data collection: 37 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2020/2021:
 - 24 with UK oil and gas workers with experience of seeking work after job loss
 - 13 with industry stakeholders (e.g. individuals from industry bodies, trade unions)
- Data analysis:
 - Template analysis (King, 2004)
 - Abductive reasoning techniques

RQ1: What contextual factors of the UK oil and gas industry influence access to reemployment for workers following job loss?

Theme I: Boom and bust

- Cyclicality
- Challenging downturns
- Insecure working arrangements

Theme II: Industry culture

- Aberdeen
- Highly paid
- Highly skilled
- Highly networked
- 'Stale, male and pale'

Theme III: Decline, evolution and uncertainty

- Significant volumes of renewable energy jobs not yet created
- Lack of clarity of future jobs and reskilling requirements
- Stigma and bureaucracy

RQ2: In this context, what factors enable the individual to exercise agency in their search for re-employment after job loss?

Goal	1. Hidden goal: Manage the mental health spiral	2. Explicit goal: Find reemployment
Resource type	Coping resources	Job search resources
Health resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical health • Mental health 	
Psychological resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolerance for uncertainty • Internal locus of control • Positive mindset • Diversified identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience • Self-efficacy • Hope • Clear goals • Adaptability
Practical resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal finances • Social support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transferable human capital • Professional networks • Proactive job search behaviours • Individually-tailored external support

Other factors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Luck • Demographics
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Conclusions

- **No Just Transition yet for UK oil and gas workers**
 - *“it's a lack of leadership... there's nobody taking ownership of it..... Everybody sitting in these, these groups, and there's no collaborative approach... no, joined up piece... the transition'll happen, but there'll be nothing just about it, unless we sort it, unless we change it”* (R, trade union officer)
- **Contextual barriers to a Just Transition:**
 - Low job security, before and after job loss
 - Lack of job volume in renewable energies
 - Lack of clarity of future jobs and reskilling requirements
 - Lack of transition support
 - Unhelpful reskilling narratives
 - Stigma and bureaucracy
- **It is up to the individual to create a Just Transition for themselves**, which requires high levels of personal resources

Contributes to:

- UK industry and government efforts towards a Just Transition (e.g. Just Transition Commission 2020 a,b; 2021; 2022)
- Just Transition literature – giving voice to UK oil and gas workers
- Re-employment theory (Wanberg et al., 1999; McArdle et al., 2007; Solove et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2017; Kanfer et al., 2001; van Hoyer et al., 2015; Latack et al., 1995; Vinokur & Schul, 2002; Van Hooft et al., 2021)

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