I've been surveying with a subcontractor for in excess of ten years now and I've come to realise there are a number of benefits both professionally and personally in comparison to surveying for a main contractor. I would summarise these as follows:

There is opportunity to deal with upward facing higher end commercial aspects that would often only be managed by senior professionals / directors within a main contracting firm, whist surveyors at my level there would often only deal with downward facing aspects such as management of subcontractors. This provides a far better understanding of the commercial legal aspects of contract formation / negotiation from an earlier point in my career.

This results in the need for a contractual understanding from a legal / risk management perspective rather than often what could be seen as a general administration perspective required by someone with a similar title within a main contracting firm and this provides a much better footing to progress in the industry

Far more exposure is offered to the higher end commercial aspects as this is a normal day to day necessity.

The role is more challenging and self-rewarding, being the party in the negotiation that isn’t holding the purse strings is always more testing and requires far more tact, quick thinking and persuasion than that of those that are.

When engaging with a main contractor I am commonly dealing with senior professionals, lawyers and persons with a greater status / title than myself which makes it all the more rewarding when a position favourable to my employers is reached

Having attended a multitude of internal courses held by our parent company which includes commercial personnel from both the subcontracting and main contracting side of the business it is clear that a greater knowledge of high end contractual aspects is held by those employed as a subcontractor and the gap on contractual capability becomes apparent very quickly.

 A lot of what drives me is the debating / negotiation and I see it as a contest where I need to come out on top with a position preferable to my peers. The benefit of being with a subcontractor is that this opportunity came much earlier in my career than it would have done with a main contractor

The thing I enjoy the most is the feeling I get when I'm involved in an intense negotiation with a large amount of potential risk to the company weighted on my shoulders and despite going in as the perceived underdog, as a subcontractor often stereotypically is, I come out having successfully argued my case and got the better of an often higher ranked professional and obtained the result ideal for my employers

Alex Walsh

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