Most strategic decision making at work happens in team meetings. Unfortunately, we have probably all been in meetings where power and conflict dynamics made the meeting less productive. Dr Ruchi Sinha and her colleagues decided to see how communication processes in team meetings affect decision quality and team productivity. Their research highlights several ways that meetings can be made more effective.
Managing Voice and Silence

Some people invariably seem to dominate the airtime in a meeting, while others are quiet. Dr Sinha found that in teams where there was a single person or a subset of people who were vocal, team performance was lower than in teams where more people spoke up. However, the personality of the dominant speaker made a difference. When that person was someone who was reflective and took the time to deliberate and consider other’s views, even teams with fewer people speaking up still performed well.

**Practical Tips:** To encourage the views of more people in the team to be heard:

- Create an environment of psychological safety to allow dissenting views, especially when there are new hires and junior members in meetings. One approach is to push the team to rethink their communication processes and adopt a format where every member is asked for specific feedback relevant to his/her expertise.

- Encourage talkative team members to be more deliberative and integrative. They can be asked to gather ideas ahead of the meeting from the quiet members and to integrate perspectives when they speak in meetings.

Managing Power Struggles in Teams

Experts often recommend minimising formal hierarchies in teams to increase psychological safety, which in turn motivates team members to speak up and share ideas. However, humans are geared to establish their position in the social order, so even without formal power differences, team members still compete for status (respect and admiration) and informal power (resources and control). But research found that these struggles are reduced when team members are not all competing for the same sources of status/power. For example, if Mary is considered the task expert (high power due to that expertise) while John is regarded as the social expert (high status/admiration for keeping the team cohesive), the two are less likely to engage in power struggles. Having multiple informal hierarchies where people can hold status or power derived from different but valued sources makes for smoother team dynamics.

**Practical Tips:** To avoid power struggles in teams and to increase psychological safety in meetings:

- Create teams with diverse power bases and skill sets so that there are multiple ways for people to gain status and power.

- Create task interdependencies where members must depend on others for task completion and decision execution. Team members are more likely to develop empathy and appreciation of others’ strengths/expertise, reducing struggles for power.

- Create shared leadership by clarifying roles and zones of expertise. A shared understanding of teammates’ knowledge and preferences can create niches of influence that reduce potential trespassing of boundaries.
Managing Constructive Debates versus Dysfunctional Conflicts

A good debate is one where issues are defined and constructively challenged, and where alternative decision paths are generated. Essential to this process are (1) consideration of both majority and minority views and (2) fostering useful disagreements about the task at hand while preventing these disagreements from being perceived as personal attacks. Research found that teams did well when there was a single contrarian (“devil’s advocate”) present. Also, ideal conditions for a healthy debate are created when divergent ideas are presented in a non-confrontational way such that other members do not see the difference of opinion as a conflict.

Practical Tips: To avoid emotional escalation and to prevent disagreements in meetings from turning into personal conflicts:

- Create openness to feedback by asking team members whether they are looking for feedback and willing to hear a contrarian view. Once people publicly affirm their openness, they are often more likely to listen to alternative ideas and utilise feedback.
- Frame disagreements as questions – this can signal openness to be challenged and is a more nuanced way to disagree with the majority decision. Another way is for a team member to ask if his/her interpretations or understanding of the other’s view is accurate and if not, what is missing. This often helps to reduce the emotional escalation of conflicts that emerge from misaligned assumptions.

Dr Ruchi Sinha is a Senior Lecturer as well as the Research Education Portfolio Leader at the School of Management, UniSA Business School. Her research expertise lies in team dynamics, particularly the role of voice, conflict, power, status and leadership within teams.
HOT OFF THE PRESSES

DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

We all know individuals who seem to be especially motivated by pay practices such as performance-based pay or group-based pay. But which employees are highly motivated by which pay practices, and why?

Profs Ingrid Fulmer and Jason Shaw proposed that one key to answering this question lies in understanding the activation of fundamental social motives among employees, such as desires for social dominance, for respect/esteem, for affiliation and for self-protection. They proposed compensation-activation theory, which predicts that a particular motive is salient (or top of mind), an employee will react more strongly to pay practices that either intensify or offer an opportunity to satisfy that motive. For example, people with salient social dominance motives (e.g., extraverts) are likely to prefer and to be more productive under individual pay-for-performance schemes that provide opportunities to compete for money and status. Fulmer and Shaw reviewed the prior compensation research and found that studies of person-based differences in reactions to pay-for-performance and to pay variation/disparity in a group have received the most research attention thus far, with the findings of those studies generally consistent with compensation-activation theory.

More generally, for organisations thinking about changing or adopting new pay systems, the logic of compensation activation can help anticipate which applicants would be newly attracted to the organisation, which employees may be more or less productive, and which are the greatest threat to leave in response to a new pay scheme.

TIME FOR AUSTRALIAN ORGANISATIONS TO SAY ‘ME TOO’

In Australia, one in four women and one in six men experienced sexual harassment at work in the past five years. Training is one of the most critical elements of a systematic approach to managing sexual harassment, but sexual harassment training is implemented unevenly around the world.

Dr Hugh Bainbridge, Prof Elissa Perry, and Prof Carol Kulik surveyed human resource practitioners in Australian and U.S. organisations to document training rates. Sexual harassment training was more prevalent in the U.S., with over 90% of organisations providing training. Only 58% of Australian organisations offered sexual harassment training.

The researchers found that practitioners in Australia and the U.S. were equally knowledgeable about training ‘best practices’. That is good news for organisations, because it suggests that HR staff are capable of designing effective training.

The bad news is that Australian practitioners reported less access to organisational resources for training. HR units with less training resources are able to train fewer members of the workforce. They are less likely to conduct pre-training needs assessment to align training with employees’ knowledge and skill levels. They rely on a smaller set of training methods and they are less likely to offer refresher modules. In combination, the limited resources mean that Australian practitioners offer less effective training.

The researchers recommend that Australian organisations ensure that the HR function in general, and training budgets in particular, are sufficiently resourced. Without those resources, HR practitioners will not be able to offer sexual harassment training that fosters positive change.


Prof Ingrid Fulmer has expertise in compensation and pay systems, human capital, and organisational performance.

Prof Carol Kulik studies the management practices that create positive environments for a diverse workforce.
Immigrant groups often pursue entrepreneurial endeavours in their new home country: they start new ventures, create jobs and contribute to the GDP. But these immigrant entrepreneurs also experience several limitations that can hinder the growth and even survival of their ventures. Although some immigrant entrepreneurs such as Sergey Brin, the Russian-American co-founder of Google, are celebrated and some venture capitalists are keen to invest in immigrant-founded firms, many entrepreneurs experience obstacles as a result of their immigrant identity. For these entrepreneurs, the question arises: When should they play up their ethnic identity versus downplay it?

Dr Shruti Sardeshmukh and her colleagues developed a theoretical framework drawing on the concepts of liability of foreignness and social identity theory in the context of immigrant entrepreneurship. They considered how immigrant entrepreneurs experience obstacles as a result of their immigrant identity. For these entrepreneurs, the question arises: When should they play up their ethnic identity versus downplay it?

Dr Shruti Sardeshmukh is passionate about people dynamics of entrepreneurship and innovation in small and large organisations.

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THE WORLD HAS CHANGED. AND WITH IT, THE WORKPLACE.

Mobile technology and a 24/7 society means a workplace can be almost anywhere at any time. And so can the competition: a global economy has created unparalleled opportunities and challenges for organisations. It has spawned unprecedented mobility, giving our home-grown talent more motive to move, while we attract a more diverse population with whom we are learning to live and work.

If that’s not enough, birth rates are falling while the population ages and skilled workers dwindle. Finding and managing the best people, regardless of gender or background, who can reach their greatest potential and help achieve the organisation’s goals is increasingly difficult. By partnering with CWeX researchers, our expertise and rigorous approach to research in diversity, employee well-being, organisational culture, change management, leadership, and human resource management practices can be applied to meet your workplace challenges of today and tomorrow.

If you have a workplace challenge, want to better harness excellence in your people and practices, or would like to become a partner in one of our ongoing projects, please contact us at 08 8302 4288 or cwex@unisa.edu.au.

Alternatively, follow us on LinkedIn for our latest activities and updates.
We look forward to hearing from you!

ARE YOU A MANAGER OR SUPERVISOR?
WE NEED YOUR HELP!

INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN NEW RESEARCH THAT WILL IMPROVE THE WORKPLACES OF TOMORROW?

Researchers at the University of South Australia Business School are conducting a research project to examine how managers and supervisors influence their employees to achieve organisational goals. What works? What doesn’t?

Participation in the project involves an online survey, face-to-face interview and questionnaire, conducted at an Adelaide location. Confidentiality is guaranteed.

In appreciation of your time, you will receive a $30 Coles/Myer gift card at the interview.

To participate, please email Belinda.Arch@mymail.unisa.edu.au or telephone 08 8302 0953.

This project has been approved by the UniSA Human Research Ethics Committee—Protocol Number: 0000035407.
EVENTS

INSIGHTS PUBLIC LECTURE:
THE WOMEN OF THE ORGANISATION

With Angela Merkel as Chancellor of Germany, Hillary Clinton’s US presidential campaign, the Australian Institute of Company Directors’ push for more women on company boards, and the recent #MeToo movement standing up to sexual harassment, questions of women’s leadership, status, and value to organisations are in the forefront today.

Prof Jenny Hoobler, an internationally-recognised scholar from the University of Pretoria, will discuss her state-of-the-art research on women’s leadership and the value it can bring to organisations. She will share her recent comprehensive analysis of academic research on the business case for women’s leadership, that is, research tying the number of women leaders to company earnings. Prof Hoobler will also examine popular beliefs about the rate at which women are ascending to leadership positions, questions of female ways of leading, and the female leadership advantage.

Thursday 5 July 2018
6:00pm - 7:00pm
Bradley Forum,
Level 5, 50-55 North Terrace,
UniSA City West Campus

Register now

ENTERPRISE PUBLIC LECTURE:
THE FUTURE OF GENDER DIVERSITY

What’s next for businesses embracing diversity at the top?

The number of organisations starting to bridge the gender gap in senior management roles continues to rise. This burst of activity is generating visible increases in gender diversity, but a closer look highlights hidden inequities and emerging challenges.

Hear from Prof Carol Kulik from UniSA Business School’s Centre for Workplace Excellence (CWeX) and South Australia’s Equal Opportunity Commissioner Dr Niki Vincent as they discuss the long-run effects of gender diversity and the impacts for organisations.

Thursday 14 June 2018
6:00pm - 7:15pm
H2-16 Allan Scott Auditorium
Hawke Building, North Terrace,
UniSA City West Campus

Register now

CARMA SHORT COURSES

The School of Management is pleased to host short courses offered by the Consortium for the Advancement of Research Methods and Analysis (CARMA)

This is a great opportunity to practice and develop your skills in research methods and meet some of the greatest names in the field:

- Prof Jean Bartunek from Boston College, USA - Qualitative Analysis for Change
- Associate Prof and William S. Spears Chair in Business Lisa Lambert from Oklahoma State University, USA - Advanced Regression Analysis

North Terrace,
UniSA City West Campus,
Adelaide

November 12-16 2018
9:00am - 5:30pm