New roles are multiplying in organisations. Look around your own organisation and you can probably spot some of these new roles: Is there a data analytics manager? An inclusion manager? A sustainability manager? Organisations often struggle with how to best support new roles. New roles do not come with a blueprint, nor can they be copied from other organisations. They have to be built from scratch. Too much structure will stifle creativity and innovation; too much freedom will lead to ambiguity and chaos. This challenge of “how much to tighten and how much to let go” continues to confound organisations.

As an example, consider the specific case of sustainability managers. Societal and regulatory concerns about businesses’ environmental and social impact (e.g., rising emissions and depleting resources) are forcing organisations to take action. Many organisations are now appointing managers to oversee their environmental and social responsibilities. Our research finds that organisations structure new sustainability roles within three configurations (prospecting, orchestrating and championing). Each configuration has distinct implications for the manager occupying the role, and the manager’s ability to fulfill a sustainability agenda.
The three configurations

Organisations with the prospecting configuration have the least formalised commitment to sustainability. In the absence of formal structures, the managers feel that they are on an uncharted journey. They struggle to access organisational resources and have limited discretion. They have trouble explaining their roles to colleagues and feel lost and adrift. Managers in prospecting configurations are trapped in an Oliver Twist scenario, continually asking their organisations to “please, sir” pay more attention to sustainability concerns.

Organisations with the orchestrating configuration have highly formalised and centralised sustainability programs. The sustainability initiatives in this configuration are developed and formalised at the corporate level. In these organisations, the sustainability managers have to justify their activities to managers in other functional areas (who resist the sustainability programs as another corporate imposition). Sustainability managers’ roles in these organisations are tightly orchestrated with low discretion. When they suggest initiatives to their organisations, the projects only get a green light if they fit the formal organisational agenda. To avoid being perceived as a bull in a china shop, they learn to curb their passion for social and environmental issues and end up feeling disempowered.

Organisations with the championing configuration have a broad overall commitment to sustainability, but the specific sustainability initiatives are not rigidly formalised. Sustainability managers in this configuration have considerable discretion to launch and champion innovative social and environmental initiatives. They leverage their discretion to successfully collaborate with internal (i.e., colleagues in other functional areas) and external (i.e., communities and regulators) stakeholders. Sustainability programs are decentralised, so social and environmental initiatives are not viewed as top-down directives but are embedded in the routine activities of other functions. Managers in championing configuration feel empowered. They see themselves as music conductors who work with their colleagues to co-create a sustainable future.

Stuck in a rut or evolving toward the ideal?

The championing configuration provides the Goldilocks fit to structuring new roles. But structure does not have to be destiny and organisations do not have to be stuck in the other configurations. As organisational programs grow, a need for efficiency and standardisation can lead the programs to evolve from low formalisation (in the prospecting configuration) to high formalisation (in the orchestrating configuration). However, evolving to the semi-structured championing configuration is not a natural outcome of the forces of growth. Evolving towards this elusive balance between structure and discretion demands both managerial and organisational engagement. A deliberate and considered transition toward the ideal configuration occurs only when active managerial championing takes place in a mature organisational context.
Can the evolution be fast tracked?

When their structures prevent organisations from achieving their desired outcomes, but progress is urgently needed, organisations may need to consider “structural overlays”. Organisations that are fumbling with creating structure around new managerial roles (i.e., organisations with the prospecting configuration) can consciously incorporate mechanistic overlays to give new managers resources, authority and a clear focus to advance specific projects. The more rigidly formalised organisations (i.e., organisations with the orchestrating configuration) can loosen the iron fist of formalisation by consciously introducing organic overlays, such as “sandboxes” for specific projects that demand innovative and collaborative responses. This will temporarily exempt managers from the organisational bureaucracy and give them the freedom to experiment and innovate. This deliberate attention to structural overlays for new roles can help organisations fast track their journey towards achieving that “just right” balance between how much to tighten and how much to let go.
DOES IT PAY TO BE A HUMBLE LEADER?

In recent years, leader humility has received extensive attention from academics and practitioners. Humble leaders are inclined to publicly admit their personal limitations, recognise followers’ strengths and contributions, and role-model a willingness to learn. Accumulated research evidence has shown that leader humility is associated with follower work engagement, team productivity, and even firm financial performance. Being humble is sometimes criticised as a “weak” leadership style, and yet humble leaders deliver benefits to their followers and organisations. Why does humility work this way?

Dr Chia-Yen (Chad) Chu and his colleagues explain that being humble is an influential leadership style because it encourages followers’ self-expansion, a psychological process in which followers see their humble leader as part of themselves. A humble leader gives followers more resources to learn and more autonomy to express voice. Also, a humble leader is approachable, creating more opportunities for followers to expand their own identities to include the leader. Using a sample of 256 leader-follower dyads in multiple companies in China, the research team found that leader humility can trigger followers’ self-expansion, make them more confident in performing their tasks, and eventually enhance their job performance.

However, leader humility may not always deliver these self-expansion effects. People are more likely to build trust and close relationships with similar others, and the research team found that leader humility was more likely to evoke self-expansion when the leader and follower had the same gender and were of similar age. The research improves our understanding about both the benefits and limitations of leader humility in organisations.

For further information about the implications of leader humility, please visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ut5I3r6VExY

BUSINESS OWNERS GET STRESSED TOO

HR departments have long known the hazards of work-stressors, and organisations increasingly implement HR policies and practices to support employee wellbeing. However, we know little about the work stressors associated with business ownership and the toll they take on the individual. Business owners’ work stressors are different from those of employees – business owners work longer hours but they have greater autonomy and control. Dr Shruti Sardeshmukh and her colleagues investigated the effects of role stressors (ambiguity and work-family conflict) on emotional exhaustion and subsequent exit intentions among business owners. In two studies (conducted in the US and Australia), they found that role ambiguity and work-family conflict generate emotional exhaustion, which then leads to intentions to exit the business. The owner’s gender also played a role: work-family conflict had a stronger relationship with emotional exhaustion among women, driving their exit intentions.

Findings from this research shed light on the work stressors experienced by small business owners, both men and women. The unique structure of small businesses and the position of owners in the organisational hierarchy mean that we may need to design stress interventions to meet the unique needs of small business owners. First, creating awareness among business owners about the stressors associated with business ownership may be a step toward developing coping routines and behaviours. For example, forming support structures (family support, entrepreneurial support networks) can help manage these stressors. Second, deliberate planning and developing decision-making protocols can help reduce ambiguity, while still maintaining the flexibility of the small business organisation. Finally, acknowledging that work-family conflict can take a toll even among business owners, and implementing support systems to help cope with work-family conflict, can help women entrepreneurs thrive.

Dr Chad Chu’s research expertise includes team leadership, social network theories and social influence.

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


HOT OFF THE PRESSES

COMMUNITY MATTERS

Many employees feel drained by the conflicting demands of their work and home lives. For some, work-life conflict depletes their energy at work and home. Over the long run, work-life conflict can lead to reduced employee commitment and increased turnover.

We know an employee’s on-the-job relationships with co-workers and supervisors can help employees cope with this conflict. Work colleagues can share work tasks, help the employee access flexible work arrangements, give friendly advice, and provide emotional support.

But could an employee’s life out of work also provide social support that enables the employee to better cope with their work-life difficulties?

Drs Gerry Treuren and Erich Fein examined if an employee’s connection to people and activities in their local community might deliver social support resources. For example, an employee’s community involvement – in their children’s school, at sporting and social clubs, with friends, or in their church – can provide helpful social support.

The researchers found that employees with more connections to their community coped better with work-life conflict, and employees with more connections were less likely to want to leave their jobs. Community involvement and attachment created the social support resources that helped employees to better cope with work-life conflict.

This research suggests employers can help themselves and their employees by making flexible work arrangements available to their staff, encouraging their employees to be involved in community activities, and supporting activities such as corporate sponsorship and volunteering.

WHEN THE CEO FEELS UNDERPAID

Employees often compare their remuneration to that of colleagues, and when employees feel underpaid, these relative pay comparisons can motivate actions to increase pay. CEOs are no different. Even though CEOs are highly paid in an absolute sense, they regularly compare their pay against the pay received by peer CEOs. However, a CEO’s reaction to feeling underpaid can have a greater impact on organisations than other employees’ reactions.

It is popularly believed that layoffs improve organisational performance by improving efficiency and/or adjusting to decreased demand (although in reality performance does not always improve). However, since CEO pay is often linked to performance, a layoff may also be a strategic way for a CEO to boost his/her relative pay standing compared to peers. After controlling for performance and other factors, Prof Fulmer and her colleagues found that, among CEOs in several large industries in the US S&P 500, the less that CEOs are paid relative to their industry peers, the more likely their organisations are to engage in layoffs. It is worrisome that relative pay comparisons might lead to this behaviour, but the good news is that corporate governance matters: boards of directors do not allow CEOs to benefit from layoffs (in terms of future relative pay changes) unless firm performance actually does subsequently improve.

The research highlights that understanding executives’ social comparisons related to their remuneration is important, both in terms of designing more effective executive compensation packages and in terms of encouraging greater oversight by corporate boards around layoff decisions.
CWEX NEWS

CWEX Summit Partner @ the 2018 South Australia HR Leadership Summit

As organisations leverage innovative practices and cutting-edge technology to meet emerging business needs and rising customers’ expectations, HR leaders are in a unique position to drive a future-fit people strategy and growth agenda. The event convened 200+ South Australian HR leaders from a range of industries to exchange ideas, challenge current thinking, and prepare for tomorrow’s demands. Professor Carol Kulik and several of our Advisory Group Members presented and participated in panels at this event.

For more information click here:
http://hrleadership.network/summit/south-australia-hr-leadership-summit/

AOM 2018 – Chicago, USA

Once again, CWEx and the School of Management attended the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management (AOM). This year, Prof Carol Kulik was introduced as the President for 2018-2019. She also participated in a Showcase Symposium: Then and now: Job design, diversity and creativity.

Several CWEx members presented their research on topics including leadership, gender diversity, power struggles in the workplace and innovative HRM teaching.

The School of Management hosted a social event with opportunities for networking, discussion, and collaboration.

IAM 2018 – Cork, Ireland

Prof Carol Kulik participated in the 21st Annual Conference of the Irish Academy of Management, where she delivered a keynote presentation on Gender equity initiatives: Good intentions and unintended consequences. Prof Kulik also served on an expert panel organised by the Cork University Business School; the panel discussed the value organisations can realistically expect from higher levels of gender diversity, particularly in management roles.
HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE INSIGHTS PUBLIC LECTURE: THE WOMEN OF THE ORGANISATION

Distinguished Thought Leader Prof Jenny Hoobler from the University of Pretoria presented to a crowded room of over 100 attendees on a very timely topic. Prof Hoobler discussed her state-of-the-art research on women’s leadership and the value it can bring to organisations. The theme of the lecture was ‘How to make the case for more women leaders’. Three key points:

1. Top female leaders are more communal AND more agentic (decisive, tenacious) than men at the top AND women in middle management.
2. One in four senior management roles globally are filled by women in a world where half of the workforce is female. Moreover, worldwide studies shows that having more women leaders is better for the organisation’s performance and decision-making.
3. Prof Hoobler’s meta analytic research shows that there is a stronger link between gender diversity in leadership roles and organisational financial performance in countries that are more gender egalitarian. When women are more respected in society, their ideas are more likely to be heard and considered in organisational decision-making.

The video of the full presentation is available online at unisabusinessschool.edu.au/research/cwex and via our LinkedIn page.

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:

SESSION 1 – NOVEMBER 12-14 (2.5 days)
Qualitative Analysis of Organisational Change
Prof Jean Bartunek, Boston College, USA
Course Description: This short course concerns exploration and critique of qualitative approaches that may be used to study change within organisations from a somewhat mezzo perspective. Course topics will include several types of change that may occur within organisations.

SESSION 2 - NOVEMBER 14-16 (2.5 days)
Advanced Regression Analysis
Associate Prof Lisa Lambert, Oklahoma State University, USA
Course Description: This short course will review problems with difference scores, introduce polynomial regression and response surface methodology, and illustrate the application of these methods using empirical examples.

Registrations open on the CARMA website.