You can trust me (can’t you?)

As more multinational enterprises establish subsidiaries in Australia, Australian managers are more likely to work closely with managers from other countries.

Understanding the underlying values that impact intercultural communication may be the key to developing trust within these relationships.

Continued on page 2

In this issue
You can trust me (can’t you?) – pp. 1–2
What is the Centre for Human Resource Management? – p. 3
CHRM Insights Annual Lecture – p. 3
CHRM-ASHRR forums – p. 3
CHRM seminars – p. 3
Is work good? – p. 4
What CHRM is working on – p. 4
You can trust me (can’t you?)

(continued from page 1)

Dr Joanna Crossman (School of Management) and Dr Hiroko Noma (a recent graduate of the School of Management, now at Kyushu International University, Japan) have been studying Japanese multinational companies operating in Australia. Their research suggests that effective communication within intercultural relationships is shaped by the individuals’ personal values. But the research also highlights the importance of the organisational context in helping managers find common ground.

The researchers were particularly interested in understanding how sunao, a fundamental Japanese value, impacted relationships between the Japanese expatriates and their Australian colleagues. ‘Sunao can be roughly translated as honesty or straightforwardness’, Dr Crossman explained. ‘But it also involves open-mindedness. Individuals can be sunao to themselves by being true to their values. They can be sunao to other people by being open to their advice and suggestions.’

The researchers interviewed 38 employees at five Japanese multinational companies operating in Australia. About half of the interviewees were Japanese expatriates and half were Australian nationals. The research participants were asked to describe their intercultural interactions, with a particular focus on describing any confusions or challenges that they encountered. The researchers found that sunao operated in two ways.

First, sunao affected how employees interpreted their colleagues’ explanations for adverse events. When something went wrong, Australian employees were likely to provide a detailed analysis of the event. However, their Japanese colleagues didn’t always react positively to these analyses. The Australians’ explanations were viewed as excuses by the Japanese, who felt that a more sunao approach would have been to take personal responsibility for whatever had happened.

‘The different ways that employees interpreted explanations for adverse events affected their ability to quickly build trust in the relationship,’ said Dr Crossman. ‘When the Japanese expatriates displayed non-sunao-like attitudes and behaviours, it impeded their ability to learn from their Australian colleagues — and again, made it difficult to develop trust-based relationships’, Dr Crossman elaborated. ‘But developing mutual sunao, in which managers and subordinates are open with one another, would have seriously violated Japanese norms about how hierarchical organisational relationships are supposed to operate.’

The research findings demonstrate that perceptions of sunao were important in developing trust in Japanese-Australian relationships at the subsidiary. However, because the Japanese and Australian employees did not necessarily share the same cultural assumptions, employees were frustrated with one another’s unsunao-like behaviour.

What can multinational organisations learn from this research? ‘It would be very useful if multinational organisations could actively mentor members of their local subsidiaries to understand national values’, Dr Crossman suggested. ‘In this situation, intercultural communication might have benefited if the Japanese managers had explained to the local workers both the meaning of sunao and the behavioural expectations that go with it.’

The research team’s findings will be published in the Journal of Business Ethics.

If you would like to learn more about the project and its results, contact: Dr Joanna Crossman (joanna.crossman@unisa.edu.au).
What is the Centre for Human Resource Management?

The Centre for Human Resource Management (CHRM) was established in 2008 and is housed in the School of Management on UniSA's City West campus.

CHRM brings together researchers with expertise in human resource management (HRM) to address major HRM-related challenges in the South Australian and international contexts. CHRM's primary objective is increasing the quality, quantity and impact of research in HRM and developing academic-industry collaborations.

What's new at CHRM?

Five CHRM members presented their research findings at the annual Australia and New Zealand Academy of Management (ANZAM) conference in Perth at the end of 2012. Their research papers addressed various dimensions of workforce diversity and the challenges associated with employee attraction and retention.

We congratulate Dr Anthony McDonnell, who received the 2012 ANZAM Early Career Researcher Award.

CHRM members Dr Yiqiong Li and Prof Peter Chen (with colleagues from the School of Psychology) have been awarded a grant from SafeWork SA. The funding will support an 18 month project on workplace bullying (see page 4 for details).

We hope you enjoy reading the CHRM newsletter.

You can learn more about CHRM, its people and its activities at our website www.unisa.edu.au/chrm.

Prof Carol T. Kulik
Director, CHRM

CHRM Insights Lecture:
To stay or not to stay?

Prof Thomas W. Lee, Foster School of Business, University of Washington, USA.

Monday 15 July 2013, 6.00pm
Bradley Forum, UniSA City West campus

Prof Lee will present research evidence supporting new theoretical perspectives on employee turnover and retention. In addition, Prof Lee will offer concrete suggestions on how managers can apply these research findings to improve retention in their workplaces.

CHRM-ASHRR forums

The Australian Senior Human Resources Roundtable (ASHRR) is a network of senior HR executives whose aim is to facilitate a more effective dialogue between HR practice and research. The CHRM-ASHRR forums bring together local senior HR practitioners and HR academics to discuss emerging HR issues.

The 6 March forum will focus on the disabled workforce in Australia. Presenters include Dr Liz Hemphill (School of Marketing), Mr Simon Hockridge (Adelaide Convention Centre) and Ms Liz Hillyer (Southern Junction Community Services).

CHRM Seminars

The CHRM Practitioner Seminars showcase industry best practice exemplars and forge links between practitioners and the CHRM community.

15 March Carole Grubisa and Greg Parker (DOME) will overview the business case for employing mature age workers.

12 April Ian Fitzgerald (Australian Public Service Commission) will discuss long-term issues for developing the Commonwealth public service.

3 May Mark Wakelin (Australian Mines and Metals Association) will discuss people management challenges of the Australian mining, oil and gas industry.

Visit our website for full details and updates www.unisa.edu.au/chrm

If you would like further information about any CHRM events, contact Tina Morganella (tina.morganella@unisa.edu.au).

Prof Carol T. Kulik
Director, CHRM
Is work good?

Some recent research might change your mind about the right answer to that question.

Usually work is very good for people. Work gives people opportunities to develop skills, build financial security, and expand their relationships. A large body of research suggests that the more hours people work (until a point where work hours become excessive), the more people accumulate those benefits.

But work is not always good. Prof Carol Kulik (School of Management), Prof Christina Cregan (University of Melbourne), and Dr Hugh Bainbridge (University of New South Wales) studied a group of severely disabled Australian workers and their caregivers. When the worker was in poor health, work had a negative effect on their psychological well-being – and on the well-being of their caregivers. Work was definitely not good for these workers, or for the people who cared for them.

The research highlights an important caveat: it’s high quality work that is good.

When people with disabilities work, they tend to be underemployed relative to their skills and qualifications. When people with disabilities work, they tend to be employed in jobs that don’t offer a lot of psychological or financial benefits.

Internationally, we are seeing policies that are designed to move people with disabilities away from welfare and into paid employment. We need to remember that these policies will only have a positive effect on well-being if the employment is high quality.

If you’d like to learn more about this research, you can watch a video abstract at http://youtu.be/EqKFYqJPGAg

What CHRM is working on

Workplace bullying

Workplace bullying, an important work-related psychosocial hazard, has become a major concern faced by organisations globally. Bullying can involve physical attacks or psychological acts (e.g., harassment, humiliation, and threats). Bullying can be direct (e.g., yelling at, or interrupting, someone at work) or indirect (e.g., gossiping about someone or excluding them from workplace activities).

Individuals who are bullied at work experience psychological distress, poor health, and job dissatisfaction. Alarmingly, up to 40% have contemplated suicide. Moreover, bystanders who witness bullying experience negative effects similar to those experienced by people who are bullied.

There are also organisational costs – compensation claims, turnover, lost productivity, lower morale, negative publicity, and damaged reputations. Bullying is also very costly for society, estimated at up to $36 billion annually in Australia.

Dr Yiqiong Li (School of Management) and Prof Peter Chen (International Graduate School of Business), along with Dr Michelle Tuckey and Prof Maureen Dollard (both from School of Psychology) are embarking on an 18 month project, funded by SafeWork SA’s Commissioned Research Grant scheme, to study the prevention of workplace bullying through risk assessment.

If you would like to learn more about the project, contact Dr Yiqiong Li (yiqiong.li@unisa.edu.au).

Would you like to receive future copies of our newsletter and updates on CHRM’s activities? Please join our mailing list by emailing tina.morganella@unisa.edu.au.