Workers who are encouraged to learn from their mistakes engage in safer on-the-job behaviours and experience less work-related pain.

Professor Peter Chen from the School of Management’s Centre for Human Resource Management has been studying factors that improve workplace safety in collaboration with Dr Konstantin Cigularov from the Illinois Institute of Technology (USA) and Associate Professor John Rosecrance from Colorado State University (USA). The research team surveyed over 200 construction workers in the Midwest and Northwest regions of the United States about how their supervisors and their worksites dealt with safety issues.

In this issue
Better safe than sorry pp.1–2
What is the Centre for Human Resource Management? – p.3
CHRM events – p.3
CHRM seminars – p.3
HR in aged care – p.4
What CHRM is working on – p.4

Continued on page 2
Better safe than sorry

(continued from page 1)

Work in the construction industry is inherently dangerous, due to the constantly changing work demands and the complex mix of employees and employers working simultaneously at a work site. ‘When you look at industry rates of fatal occupational injuries, construction is usually among the top four’ Professor Chen said. ‘That’s why it is so important to develop work environments that motivate workers to engage in safe practices at construction sites.’

The research team asked construction workers to describe how comfortable they felt discussing safety issues with their supervisor. The workers also reported on their worksite’s ‘error management climate.’ As Professor Chen explained, ‘people and workplaces aren’t perfect, so mistakes will happen. But workplaces with a positive error management climate encourage workers to acknowledge their mistakes, to correct mistakes quickly, and to learn strategies to avoid making those mistakes again.’

The research results showed that workers who were able to discuss safety issues with their supervisors engaged in safety behaviours more frequently. They used protective equipment more often, participated in more voluntary safety training, and were more likely to help co-workers do their jobs safely. Also, workers who were able to discuss safety issues with their supervisors reported that they had experienced less physical pain in the last four months than workers who felt unable to discuss such issues with their supervisors.

The worksite’s error management climate mattered too. At worksites with a positive error management climate, workers viewed errors as a useful way to improve the work process; they felt comfortable sharing their errors with others and asking for advice on how to continue the work. And, at worksites with a positive error management climate, workers engaged in more safety behaviours and reported less physical pain.

The team’s findings clearly indicate that construction sites would benefit from a positive approach to managing errors. But developing a positive error management climate may be easier said than done.

Professor Chen emphasises the important role that supervisors play in promoting safety. ‘Some supervisors create a climate of fear at construction sites. They punish workers who make mistakes, and that makes workers less willing to admit their mistakes’ Professor Chen elaborated. ‘Effective supervisors, though, maintain a balance. On the one hand, they take errors very seriously because errors in construction can cause serious or even fatal injuries. On the other hand, effective supervisors also demonstrate some tolerance for errors and use errors as opportunities for learning.’

However, supervisors are not the only people who are responsible for a worksite’s error management climate. ‘Supervisors have a very direct influence on construction workers’ willingness to speak up about safety issues. But a worksite’s error management climate is also reinforced by other people, including the contractor, the site’s safety officer, and the other workers in the construction crew. Therefore, organisations that want to develop a positive error management climate need to focus their efforts on all of these stakeholders.’

The research team published their findings in Accident Analysis and Prevention (2010, Vol. 42, Issue 5).

If you would like to learn more about the project and its results, contact:

Professor Peter Chen  
peter.chen@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). CHRM members 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 industry collaborations.

What's new at CHRM?

CHRM is celebrating the award of a new Linkage Grant funded by the Australian Research Council. The grant will support a three-year project focusing on the employment outcomes of people with disabilities (see Page 4 for details).

CHRM bids farewell to Associate Professor Jie Shen, who is joining the School of Management at Curtin University of Technology in Perth. We wish Jie success in the next phase of his career.

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

Professor Carol T. Kulik
Director, CHRM

CHRM events

CHRM and the Centre for Asian Business (CAB) will be hosting a book launch in honour of ‘The Dynamics of Asian Labour Markets: Balancing Control and Flexibility’ edited by Professor John Benson (Head of School of Management and CHRM researcher) and Professor Ying Zhu (CAB Director). This book is published by Routledge, London and New York. The book launch will be held on Wednesday 29th June, 12-2pm, at the City West Campus.

If you’d like to join us at the launch, please register at http://www.unisa.edu.au/asianbusiness/events/booklaunch.asp

Since 2008, CHRM has been the South Australian research partner for ASHRR – 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 partnership sponsors twice yearly events, forums in which local senior HR practitioners and HR academics can network and debate emerging HR issues.

The 21st September CHRM-ASHRR Forum will examine how HR can transform the rhetoric on talent management into strategic organisational action. Our panel of presenters will include Dr Anthony McDonnell (CHRM researcher) and Mr Tony Macolino (National HR Operations Manager, Coca-Cola Amatil) who will discuss issues related to local and global talent management.

If your organisation would like more information about upcoming CHRM events, please contact sanjee.perera@unisa.edu.au

CHRM seminars

The CHRM Practitioner Seminars, coordinated by Drs Anthony McDonnell, Shruti Sardeshmukh and Gerry Treuren, showcase industry best practice exemplars and provide an opportunity to forge links between practitioners and the CHRM community. The seminars attract students from the undergraduate and postgraduate HRM programs, past students and interested practitioners. Upcoming seminars include:

August 5, 2011 ‘The impact of an influential HRM function on organisational survival - the case of Holden during the GFC’ presented by Mr Ashley Winnett, HR Director, Labour and Manufacturing, General Motors Holden.

August 19, 2011 ‘The National OHS System starting January 1, 2012’ presented by Mr Robin Shaw, Manager, Self Insurers of South Australia.

If you would like to join us at a future seminar, please visit our website for full details and updates www.unisa.edu.au/chrm
HR in aged care

Aging Baby Boomers are generating demand for aged care facilities and the employees who work in them. In South Australia, for example, the proportion of the population over retirement age will double by 2031.

For HR, the first challenge is about gearing up. Baby Boomer clients demand quality, and they often have the resources to pay for premium facilities. But those facilities need staff. The explosive growth of the mining sector is drawing labour out of the cities – leaving behind a smaller pool of applicants from which aged care providers can draw. And the low pay and difficult working conditions may make it even harder to attract new employees to aged care jobs.

The second challenge will be about scaling back. The aged care boom may only last 20 to 30 years. That’s when the members of Generation X will start to retire, and these retirees will be fewer in number and less affluent than their parents.

Innovative HR practitioners are moving away from a one-size-fits-all model that staffs permanent structures with full-time employees and experimenting with more flexible and less capital intensive alternatives. For example, providers may deliver care across a continuum ranging from occasional help to people living in their own homes to full-service facilities for clients who need a higher level of care.

If you’re interested in learning more about the role HR plays in the aged care sector, contact:

Dr Gerry Treuren
gerry.treuren@unisa.edu.au

What CHRM is working on

Employment outcomes for people with disabilities

In Australia, nearly four million people (20% of the population) have a disability that restricts their everyday activities. However, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is 8.6%, compared to 5% for people without disabilities.

The Australian government is investing over $5 billion over five years in disability services. A significant portion of this funding goes to agencies that deliver employment support to jobseekers with disabilities. Specialist employment agencies play a key ‘linking pin’ role, motivating jobseekers with disabilities to seek employment and encouraging local employers to consider job applicants with disabilities.

Unfortunately, these agencies face an uphill battle. Employers often have negative stereotypes about people with disabilities, anticipating that they will be poor performers and require expensive job accommodations. Further, employers are sometimes concerned that customers and community members will react negatively to employees with disabilities, negatively affecting the bottom line. As a result, jobseekers with disabilities often accept short-term low-wage employment in disability-focused enterprises rather than face repeated rejection from mainstream employers.

Professor Carol Kulik (Director, CHRM) and Dr Elizabeth Hemphill (School of Marketing) are embarking on a three-year project in collaboration with industry partner Finding Workable Solutions Inc. The purpose of the project is to identify strategies to increase the employment of people with disabilities in regional businesses.

If you’d like to learn more about the project, contact:

Professor Carol T. Kulik
carol.kulik@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 sanjee.perera@unisa.edu.au