

Voices on the Edge February 2012

Division of work and Organisational Psychology (DWOP) - Newsletter

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Editors' Voice

Welcome to this spring issue of *Voices on the Edge* – February the month of inspiration derived from our ancient heritage – Brigid (Goddess and Saint)

We welcome DWOP's Chair Yseult Freeney who maps some core aspects of gender issues and Management and Leadership in today's work settings (P.1).

Our colleagues in the Ballymun Job Centre have long supported the work of DWOP. Nuala Whelan, Director of the Euro-

pean Programmes (Leonardo da Vinci and others), highlight salient aspects of marginalised young people who seek training, learning and development. She shares with us critical common challenges across key EU countries (P.2).

The voice of Limerick and issues under analyses are introduced by Deirdre O'Shea with a further focus on gender (P.2).

Jerry Dixon – explores the chal-

lenges for the unemployed and Return to Work Programmes in these critical times of austerity and recession and rapid organisational transformations and Person – Organisational - fit dilemmas (P.3-4).

Forthcoming conferences and seminars of interest to members are listed on the back page of the newsletter.

Voice from the Chair - Yseult Freeney

Old wine in new bottles is a phrase that often accompanies reviews on the latest hot topics in work and organisational psychology to capture the attention of both researchers and academics alike. My own area of research, work engagement, is certainly no stranger to having to defend itself as more than a buzzword. Yet while buzzwords and crazes in the field come and go, there are some age old issues that are never resolved and remain as relevant today as they were at the birth of PSI, some four decades ago.

At a seminar by a visiting academic, Dr. Clara Kulich, to DCU Business School last month, I was reminded of the stark inequalities that remain between men and women in contemporary workplaces. The evidence clearly demonstrates a wide gender pay gap and one

that only widens the higher women climb. Kulich's research also confirms that the better a company performs, the greater the bonus for male leaders but this increased reward does not exist for female leaders. It appears that men simply do not have to prove their performance. However, there is more to this issue than mere pay inequality. Readers are probably very familiar with the Glass Ceiling but I speculate that only a small proportion is acquainted with the Glass Cliff (Ryan & Haslam, 2007, 2008). This term is used to describe the phenomenon whereby women tend to be appointed to leadership positions that are associated with an increased risk of criticism and failure and often where the company is already performing poorly. Women's leadership positions can thus be seen as more precarious than those of men. The scope of this

editorial does not allow for an in-depth review of the varied explanations for this gap but role congruity theory is worth a mention (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Role congruity describes a prejudice toward female leaders and proposes that perceived incongruity between the female gender role (communal, nurturing etc.) and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice: first, women are not perceived as natural occupants of leadership roles and second, women who enact leader-type behaviours are evaluated less favourably than men enacting the same behaviours because these behaviours are not considered 'feminine' or appropriate for women.

How can female employees and leaders be assisted in facing off this discrimination? Well there are a number of points to note. Firstly, research points to the

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“The value created by training can include benefits for the employer, benefits for the employee, their colleagues, their families and the customer. “

simple fact that women do not ask when it comes to negotiating pay. Thus, assertiveness and negotiating skills would benefit women in this regard. Secondly, men are generally more confident about their performance and are more likely to make their successes and achievements be known. Female employees need to reflect on their achievements and be confident in communicating these to their colleagues and superiors. Finally, theories of transformational leadership and more recently, authentic leadership may offer some hope in that they are far more accommodating of the strengths that women bring to leadership roles. Women are

still vastly underrepresented in the senior echelons of business, political and educational organisations but through further coaching, personal development and open-mindedness on the part of organisations, perhaps the 21st century will at last bring about meaningful and positive change for female employees, their organisations and the societies they serve. On a post script note, considering that this is my first newsletter, I would also like to take this opportunity to reacquaint our members with our current diligent committee members

Honorary Secretary and Chair Elect: Aoife Lyons
Treasurer: Shane Barry

Membership Secretary: Ciara Bolger
CPD Chair: Kathryn McCarthy
Supervised Practice Chair: Joan Tiernan

(Extra-!) Ordinary Members: Eunice McCarthy, Jerry Dixon, Peter Clarke, Ian Clifford, Marian Vickers and Edel Moloney.

Their generous time, commitment and support are much valued and I look forward to continuing our endeavours over the next eighteen months. Warm regards,
Yseult Freaney

MOTIVES - Measuring Organisational Training: Illustrating Value, Economic & Social



Training in work organisations is an area of applied psychological research that is particularly well suited for making a clear contribution to the enhancement of human well-being and performance in organisational and work settings as well as in society in general. (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009)

The value created by training can include benefits for the employer, benefits for the employee, their colleagues, their families and the customer. The MOTIVES EU-wide partnership is developing an online measuring system based on the principles of Social Return on Investment (SROI) where employers/

SMEs, training consultants and training providers can meticulously evaluate and gauge the economic and social value of training provided by them for their employees, most particularly for low-skilled employees.

SROI is an evaluation framework for measuring and accounting for the value created by an organisation, service project or activity. It tells the story of how change is being created by measuring outcomes and uses monetary values to represent them. However SROI is about value rather than money.

The MOTIVES system (online training evaluation tool and one day training course in using the tool and methodology) will be piloted with 45 Small and Medium Enterprises across Europe during May and June 2012.

If you are interested in the

MOTIVES tool/training and would like more information please contact:

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MOTIVES (2010 – 2012)
Lifelong Learning Programme: Leonardo da Vinci
Transfer of Innovation project



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

Reference

Aguinis, H. & Kraiger, K. (2009). Benefits of Training and Development for Teams, Organisations and Society: Annually Review of Psychology Vol. 60 : 451-474

DWOP Seminar: “The Ageing Worker” 8th November

On 8th November, Prof. Jeanette Cleveland gave a DWOP seminar entitled “The Ageing Worker” at the Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick. Prof. Cleveland discussed the many issues relating to the increasingly ageing workforce across the globe, including the characteristics associated with four age generations within the workforce, and the difficulties for organisations in managing age diversity within its workforce. Issues relating to ageing stereotypes were addressed, as were the gender differences that come to the fore in the older generation of workers. Of particular inter-

est was the focus on prominent human resource issues prevalent to an ageing workforce, including selection and retention, the motivation of ageing workers, and career trajectories of aging workers. The seminar was well attended on the night, and Prof. Cleveland led a lively and extended discussion on many of the issues raised in the seminar.

Prof. Cleveland is Professor in Industrial and Organizational Psychology at Colorado State University. She earned her B.S. from Occidental College and M.S./Ph.D from the Pennsylvania State University. She became

an Academy member in 1987 and elected Program Chair for the Human Resources and Gender & Diversity in Organizations Divisions, Division Chair for HR and GDO, and prior to this to the Executive committees for these Divisions. Her research interests include work attitudes and performance decisions, workforce diversity issues including older workers and women, and work and family issues.

This seminar was the first DWOP seminar to be held in Limerick, and further seminars at this location are in the process of being planned.



Prof. Jeanette Cleveland

“The value created by training can include benefits for the employer, benefits for the employee, their colleagues, their families and the customer.”

Re-employment Psychology : Squaring up to the Big Issue.

Jerry Dixon M.Sc. (W/O Psych), Associate Fellow of the PSI, Reg Work & Org. Psychol., Ps.S.I

‘Ireland currently stands in a vortex of change experienced at every level of society. Employment and organisational life is no exception, with every category, type, and size of organisation rapidly attempting to evolve and survive in an environment where human resources are now frequently perceived as the life force of an organisation, and the source of its development and success. Many branches of psychology are concerned with such change.’

This passage served as the introduction of a short article called, ‘Reemployment Psychology: A Personal View’, written by the author back in 2004. Narrative wise, the words mean the same; except nowadays the vortex of change in the current eco-

nomic downturn is spinning in a very different direction to what it was in 2004. In addition, it is with gratitude that the area of reemployment psychology as an emergent discipline and its domains of research are not quite so ‘overlooked’ as they were just a few short years ago. The unfortunate issue is and remains, that too many valid research articles are left to gather dust on the shelves rather than have their recommendations disseminated to those who can benefit from them most. Accepted, there are many fields of applied psychology where this is not an issue, but many prominent researchers in the field of reemployment research concede that most of the advice and instruction available to assist job seekers is largely subjective and anecdotal in origin. As such, there no better time to call for change and to disseminate some of the recent research findings that cate-

gorically highlight the role of psychology in unemployment and its applied potential in reemployment.

As far back as 1998, Ashforth & Fried claimed that many organisational systems of work and behaviour were inevitably resulting in mindlessness. This Mindlessness, or similarly, Skill Amnesia (as described by Dixon, 2008), can relate working conditions, task routines, cultural norms, and social protocols in the work place to the psycho-social and cognitive difficulties, and affective pathologies associated with unemployment, and arguably prolong the reemployment process. Ireland, like many other countries passively entertained the McDonalization of commerce and organisational culture which resulted in a gradual ‘bottom up’ reduction of attentional processes (Cohen & Bacdayan, 1994) for the sake of organ-



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isational consistency and efficiency. Ultimately, many job seekers experience difficulty, firstly, being aware of their own skills and restricted by cultural modesty, secondly, being able to recognise contemporary skills associated with Person : Organisation Fit or recall specific exemplars that demonstrate their skills in action, thirdly, being then able to articulate those skills in a confident and reassuring manner, and fourthly, knowing how to actively and efficiently job seek in a rapidly changing environment.

Essentially, the work environment has evolved more rapidly than what most job seekers are aware of. Even quite professional, and highly skilled unemployed persons confess they don't know how to succeed in job seeking, claiming they never had to before! Ask yourself the question, 'Where & How did you learn to job seek anyway?' Few tasks are more important in life, nor equally as influential to our developmental pathways.

Theories and findings from organ-

isational research, social psychology, mindfulness and self-efficacy as well as other domains of human enquiry add credence to Michael Argyle's (1994) suggestion that percepts of the 'perceived self', may not necessarily reflect the 'actual self'. The issue is, it is the perceived self perception will often guide job seeking behaviour, and the motivation & energy expended, the level and status of jobs applied for, and also reportedly predict the outcome of job seeking endeavours.

Traditionally, humanistic approaches to client work have generally taken a non-directive stance. However, the issue of mindlessness, skill amnesia, and other cognitive behavioural issues facing the average job seeker indicate that a more solution focussed and guidance type approach may be more appropriate. For this reason (amongst many others), the positivistic ethos of coaching and coaching psychology is an ideal medium for addressing reemployment guidance and training with job seekers. The growing array of reemployment research provides the

evidence and the theory base, while elements of methodologies like CBT, SF Brief Therapy, and Coaching provide the framework for effective delivery and client development.

References

Argyle, M. (1994) *The Psychology of Interpersonal Behaviour* (5th Edition). London : Penguin Books.

Ashforth, B.E., & Fried, Y. (1988) The Mindlessness of Organisational Behaviors. *Human Relations*. 41, 305-329.

Cohen, M.D., & Bacdayan, P. (1994) Organizational Routines are Stored as Procedural Memory: Evidence From a Laboratory Study. *Organizational Science*. 5, 554-568.

Dixon, J. (2008). Skill Amnesia: Is unemployment learned, and confidence lost through experiences of work. Presentation at The Psychological Society of Ireland. 39th Annual Conference, Cork, Nov. 2008.

Future Events

DWOP-CPG seminar 13th March 2012 PSI Seminar Room 6.15 p.m. on Complexity, Stress, Coaching and Change by Prof. Eunice McCarthy, PhD.

DWOP Seminar 24th April 2012 PSI Office Grantham House on 'Employee Engagement: Fostering Energy and Fulfilment At Work' by Yseult Freeney, PhD.

DWOP Master Class (Date to be confirmed) PSI Office Grantham House on 'Facilitation Skills' by Michela McGinley

30th International Congress of Psychology, Capetown, South Africa - Psychology Serving Humanity. www.icp2012.com.

We are glad to inform you that Ruth Mullally, Jerry Dixon, Ann Staunton and Eunice McCarthy will be presenting papers.