

ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER - ISSUE #1



HEAD OF DEPARTMENT'S FOREWORD

Welcome to this first newsletter of the Department of Organizational Psychology. We've been meaning to have our own newsletter for some time, and with the recent addition of new academic and support staff to our team, we now have the motivation and the impetus to communicate with you, our alumni, friends and supporters. Our regular content will feature us in the press, research updates, staffing updates and also news on exciting programme developments. And you know what – we should also have an alumni column, could you share what you've been up to with us? Please [get in touch](#) if so. We look forward to our continued exchange.

Professor Almuth McDowall
Head of Department

VIEWS FROM THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT ON COVID-19

I am writing to you during unprecedented times. Work, education and life are no longer as we know them. Fundamental change is happening all around us, right before our eyes. Many of us have had direct and very personal experience of how coronavirus affects health, relationships and families. From now on, we will think differently about commutes, travel, health, physical and emotional distance and the value of communities and togetherness.

In Organizational Psychology and our wider School of Business, Economics and Informatics,

our community has become strengthened if anything. Colleagues have worked tirelessly to adapt their teaching and support students and colleagues. Our School leadership committee has been proactive about thinking ahead to the next challenge and we have pulled together to move all teaching online in a matter of two weeks. This brought home that you cannot put a price on the people you work with. Rewards, TEFs and REFs (the metrics by which UK academics get assessed) lose meaning in a crisis. Community suddenly means everything. We have been bolstered by the many supportive emails from students who have thanked us all for our efforts. It is also heartening how much our advice and input has been sought. We hope to continue giving our expertise freely. From next week, some of us will support the NHS by offering free online webinars to support staff. Other initiatives will no doubt follow. For the moment, we have had to postpone our events, but are looking to reschedule as soon as we can.

It is great to witness how people are looking after their health and wellbeing. I love watching mother-son, father-daughter combinations out jogging in my neighbourhood. As a former dancer, I recently refreshed my instructor qualifications and now teach ballet bootcamps. Of course, face to face classes have had to stop, but I can still teach online and hope to also offer these to OP students in the summer term.

Lastly, it is so heartening to use these strange times to reconnect with old friends. Just before and during the crisis two very old friends got in touch, one after a gap of nearly 35 years. Curiously, we picked things up where we left them. Our friendship and sense of connection seems unchanged and has been a source of joy and inspiration. Not a blast, but a sparkle from the past which connects me to the now, and to the future. Stay safe everyone and stay healthy – let's hope the context will have changed by the time we send out our next newsletter.

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

BRING IN YOUR PARENTS DAY: AN INCLUSIVE ALTERNATIVE TO BOOST EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Dr Alexandra Beauregard explores the impact of LinkedIn's employee engagement initiative.



Employee-sponsored family-friendly events are designed to boost engagement and encourage retention by building family members' identification with the organization. However, longstanding traditions such as 'Bring Your Children to Work' days inadvertently exclude employees without caregiving responsibilities for children.

That's where 'Bring in Your Parents' (BIYP) comes in. Launched by LinkedIn in 2013, the initiative targets a segment of the workforce not usually included in family-friendly initiatives: employees from the 'Generation Y', 'Millennial' or 'Generation Z' generations, born after 1981. After internal conversations at LinkedIn revealed that employees struggled to explain the nature of their work to parents who were not familiar with social media, LinkedIn introduced BIYP as a means of improving older parents' understanding of their children's jobs.

Together with Dr Karin King at LSE, I conducted a study to evaluate the impact of BIYP on the attitudes and behavioural intentions of employees and their parents. We surveyed participating employees and their parents in six organisations in six countries, followed by

in-person interviews with participating employees and phone interviews with HR managers.

Following participation in BIYP, there were statistically significant increases in employee engagement and perceived problem-solving ability. By bringing parents to the workplace and having them learn about the nature of one's job responsibilities, employees' enthusiasm and sense of vitality on the job were renewed.

BIYP also improved parental understanding of their child's job. While the new, non-traditional jobs performed by their children seemed intangible to many parents prior to participating in BIYP, they now make more sense. Employees reported that having their parents better understand their work responsibilities and pace of work enabled parents to offer more frequent and appropriate support.

Furthermore, following parents' participation in BIYP, there were significant increases in identification with their children's organizations and of willingness to promote their children's organization to outsiders. Parents became brand advocates among their own peer groups and even encouraged their children to stay with the firm for longer.

By incorporating events such as BIYP into existing family-friendly events, organizations can express their support for the work-family balance of all employees, rather than just those with caregiving responsibilities for children. Participation was shown to benefit all involved: employees, their parents or other family guests, and the organization for whom they work. The development of further initiatives that support employers in demonstrating inclusion, deepening employee engagement and widening organizational engagement with a range of stakeholders beyond the employee would be a welcome next step.

The citation for this study is: Beauregard, T. A., & King, K. A. (2019). "Bring in Your Parents Day": Building inclusion and engagement through a cross-generational family-friendly workplace initiative. Strategic HR Review, (19)1, 15-21.

WORKING CONDITIONS, EXPOSURE TO TRAUMA AND THE MENTAL HEALTH OF FIREFIGHTERS

Dr Kevin Teoh shares the findings so far from the Firefighter Longitudinal Health Study.



Firefighters play a crucial role in the emergency response system, the nature of which is often physically, mentally and emotionally challenging. It is not surprising that firefighters report high levels of burnout, posttraumatic stress and common mental health disorders (Katsavouni et al., 2016; Lima & Assunção, 2011; Noor et al, 2019).

To better understand what, and how, different factors lead to the development of poor mental health in firefighters, in 2018 psychologists Dr Eduardo de Paula Lima and Dr Aline Gomide Vasconcelos visited the Birkbeck Centre for Sustainable Working Life for a six-month Fellowship. They came from the Minas Gerais Fire Department, whose firefighters received international media coverage when the Brumadinho dam collapsed in 2019, leading to the loss of at least 256 lives.

The cornerstone of our collaboration is the ongoing Firefighter Longitudinal Health Study (FLOHS), which aims to better understand the relationships among individual, operational and organisational risk factors in the development of post-traumatic symptoms and other mental health problems in firefighters.

A simplistic take on the poor mental health of firefighters is that this is the product of the challenging work that they do. However, this ignores consistent research showing that psychosocial working conditions can have a

beneficial and detrimental impact on our mental health (Harvey et al., 2017). Within the field of organizational psychology, psychosocial working conditions refer to how work is designed, organised and managed.

As psychologists, we were not only interested in whether exposure to traumatic events had a link to firefighters' mental health, but whether psychosocial working conditions had a similar effect. In our first published study from the FLOHS project, three types of psychosocial working conditions were measured: how demanding the job is (job demands), how much influence one has on their work environment (job control) and how supported one is (social support). The findings were quite clear:

- 13% of firefighters reported a level of poor mental health that warrants psychological intervention.
- Higher levels of exposure to trauma and higher levels of job demands were associated with poorer mental health.
- Higher levels of job control and social support were associated with better mental health.
- The strength of the relationship that job demands had on poor mental health reduced when firefighters reported high levels of either job control or social support.

The findings show that to support the mental health of firefighters, fire departments should focus on reducing the levels of job demands while increasing the levels of social support and job control. Given the inherently difficult nature of firefighting, the very least that firefighters deserve is to work in an organisation where the psychosocial working conditions are not another contributing factor to poor mental health. This message has direct relevance to workers in other occupations within the emergency services. Our findings also emphasise that supporting the mental health of workers requires improvements to their psychosocial working conditions and needs to focus on the organisation itself – not individual interventions such as resilience or mindfulness training (Kinman & Teoh, 2018).

IS JOB SHARING THE FUTURE FOR ACADEMICS?

Could job sharing help to address work stress and the gender pay gap in academia?



Dr Rachel Lewis and Dr Jo Yarker, Senior Lecturers, believe just that. Their arrangement represents the first appointment of its kind amongst academics at Birkbeck.

Research by Kinman and Jones recognises the stressful nature of the academic role and working environment, which is particularly acute in more junior academic positions, and in women. Fifteen years on from the launch of the Athena Swan Charter, the gender pay gap is still at 15.3% and women are underrepresented in Professorial and Senior roles.

“In working together, we can fulfil one FTE and as such be treated equitably on that footing,” said Lewis and Yarker. “This means that our workload is distributed in the same way as full time staff but beyond that, we can support each other and enable our mutual research goals to thrive. Job sharing has allowed us both to follow our passions and drive our careers forward; we act as each other’s trusted advisor and support, meaning that we can really focus our goals and deliver more for the university than would be possible if we were working independently.”

Lewis and Yarker’s somewhat unusual arrangement has been noticed by two colleagues who have followed suit and applied for a job share arrangement too. Janet Sheath and Dr Susan Kahn share responsibility for the Department’s coaching portfolio and from Autumn 2020 will be directing four programmes

between them. Speaking of how the job share came about, Sheath joked that they sold it as ‘two for the price of one’: “Between us we have considerable experience as practitioners and access to broader career and coaching networks, as well as bringing our unique research interests to the role. I wouldn’t want to only teach or only practice, I’ve always done both, and we both continue to bring up to date knowledge as practitioners to the classroom.”

Kahn echoes Lewis and Yarker’s sentiments on the personal and professional benefits: “Starting the role together removed the feelings of isolation that sometimes accompany a new position and we’ve developed a safe, supportive space in which to explore new ideas. We also share a sense of humour and have a lot of laughs, too!” Could this be a sign of the future?

CORONAVIRUS: OP RESPONDS

Our academics have been sharing their expertise in managing burnout and stress and tips on working from home during the coronavirus pandemic. Catch up on their guidance here.

- **Professor Almuth McDowall** shares her [tips for home workers](#) in The Independent.
- **Dr Kevin Teoh** and **Professor Gail Kinman** share [ways doctors can look after themselves](#) in the BMJ opinion.
- **Dr Rachel Lewis** shares her insights into [working from home ergonomically and safely](#) in a Chartered Institute of Ergonomics & Human Factors podcast. She also shares [tips to support mental health](#) resilience for International SOS.
- **Dr Caroline Kamau** was interviewed by the BBC on [eating a healthy diet](#) while working from home.
- **Dr Kevin Teoh** posted a [Twitter thread](#) with tips on coping in times of uncertainty.
- **Professor Gail Kinman** is part of BPS’s Coronavirus Staff Wellbeing Group that issued [guidance](#) on the psychological needs of healthcare staff as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic

AWARDS, HONOURS AND APPOINTMENTS

- Organizational Psychology academics took home both research awards from the 2019 British Psychological Society and Division of Occupational Psychology awards ceremony. **Dr Rachel Lewis** and **Dr Jo Yarker** were awarded the DOP Excellence in Occupational Psychology Research Award and **Dr Kevin Teoh** was awarded the DOP Excellence in Occupational Psychology Research Award (Early Career).
- **Dr Alexandra Beaugard (OP)** was elected to the Executive Board of the Work and Family Researchers Network (WFRN), an international membership organization of interdisciplinary work and family researchers based in the USA.
- **Dr Vanessa Iwowo (OP)** was appointed as Visiting Fellow to the Firoz Lalji Africa Centre at the London School of Economics.
- **Professor Almuth McDowall (OP)** was invited by the UK Ministry of Defence to attend an Innovation Sandpit in November 2019. She is now involved in two collaborative funded scoping projects to research the future of defence.
- **Professor Gail Kinman, Shafag Garayeva** and **Kirsty Lauder (OP)** have obtained a full grant from the British Psychological Society to represent the Division of Occupational Psychology at the Congress of the European Academy of Occupational Health in Nicosia, Cyprus, April 2020.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- **Dr Rachel Lewis** and **Dr Jo Yarker (OP)** were invited speakers at Health and Wellbeing at Work 2020 in Birmingham in March. Lewis presented at two sessions on business travel and managing remote work, while Yarker spoke on managing return to work.
- **Dr Kevin Teoh (OP)** presented at a national working group of senior NHS and nursing leaders working on supporting the mental health of nurses and midwives in the United Kingdom.
- The Department of Organizational Psychology had a strong presence at the Division of Occupational Psychology Conference in January 2020, including recent graduates presenting from their dissertation projects (**Kirsty Denyer, Zainal Ezzat Adel, Jo Gray, Maria Falsone** and **Fiona Falkingham**) alongside staff and PhD students (**Professor Almuth McDowall, Dr Kevin Teoh, Dr Jo Yarker, Dr Rachel Lewis, Dr Nancy Doyle** and **Shafag Garayeva**).

LATEST PROGRAMME INNOVATIONS

The following programmes are being offered for the first time this year:

- MSc Coaching Psychology
- PG Cert Career Coaching

The following programmes have changed their title:

- The PG Cert Coaching is now the PG Cert Coaching Psychology
- The MSc Career Management and Coaching is now the MSc Career Coaching

NEW STAFF APPOINTMENTS

We are pleased to welcome the following new colleagues:

- **Dr Yi-Ling Lai**, Lecturer. Dr Lai's work focuses on coaching and wellbeing.
- **Professor Gail Kinman**, Visiting Professor. Professor Kinman is interested in the psychosocial working conditions of those who do emotionally demanding and knowledge intensive work and how this affects their wellbeing and job performance.
- **Dr Alan Redman**, Research Fellow
- **Dr Nancy Doyle**, Research Fellow
- **Dr Keely Frasca**, Research Fellow

STAFF LEAVERS

We say goodbye to the following staff members and wish them all the best in the future.

- **Dr Julie Dickinson**
- **Dr Andreas Liefoghe**
- **Alexander Aspen** – Team Leader
- **Jenny Kananov** - Associate Tutor

DR FRANK WATT MBA MSC PHD

It is with deep sadness that we announce that our alumnus Frank Watt has died suddenly at the age of 62. His PhD, earned in 2016, focused on the importance of community self-efficacy in recovering from disasters. A long serving fire officer, Frank had left school with few academic qualifications and came to flourish academically later in life. His research had been presented at the UN Global Risk Forum in Davos and published in an edited volume. At the time of his untimely death, further publications were due to be published and he had recently been appointed as an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Warwick.

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

Journal Articles

- Au, W., Chatrakul Na Ayudhya, U., Soon, Y., & Ahmed, P.K. (2019, online first) The work-life experiences of an invisible workforce: The case of live-in women migrant domestic workers in Malaysia. *Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: An International Journal*.
- **Beauregard, T. A., & King, K. A.** (2019). "Bring in Your Parents Day": Building inclusion and engagement through a cross-generational family-friendly workplace initiative. *Strategic HR Review*, (19)1, 15-21.
- Booth, J. E., & **Beauregard, T. A.** (2019), Workplace silence, today? Transgender employees' voice and well-being. *LERA Perspectives on Work*, 23(1), 24-29.
- **Chatrakul Na Ayudhya, U., Prouska, R., & Beauregard, T. A.** (2019). The impact of global economic crisis and austerity on quality of working life and work-life balance: A capabilities perspective. *European Management Review*, 16(4), 847-862.
- **Evans, S., Whiting, R., & MacKenzie-Davey, K.** (2020), Struggles for distinction: Classing as discursive process in UK museum work. *Gender, Work & Organization*.
- **McDowall, A. & Brown, J.** (accepted), Do good cops need a degree? Special issue on policing education (editorial) for *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*.
- **Teoh, K. R. H., Lima, E., Vasconcelos, A., Nascimento, E., & Cox, T.** (2019), Trauma and work factors as predictors of firefighters' psychiatric distress. *Occupational Medicine*, 69(8-9), 598-603. doi: 10.1093/occmed/kqz168.

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