

ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER - ISSUE #7



HEAD OF DEPARTMENT'S FOREWORD

Welcome to the spring edition of our newsletter. The research spotlight and staff spotlight in this issue illustrate our commitment to undertaking research with practical implications – underpinned by our critical Birkbeck spirit. The messages from Lucinda's research are simple. Solicitors have better wellbeing if they feel in control, apply their skills and feel that they belong. A sense of mindfulness is important, too. These are important issues for law firms to bring to the forefront, as this is a profession driven by exacting standards and pressure to perform. Regular feedback and opportunities to connect are crucial. In the long term, what can organisations do to put people first in the post pandemic world of work? We are eagerly awaiting what comes out of Rashpal's ongoing work on collective trauma and wellbeing in the wake of COVID-19.

We are looking forward to connecting with you in person again in spring and summer. The first event is our Qualitative Methods in Action Day on 12 May. Save the date for our annual summer seminar on 29 June and the Alec Roger Memorial Lecture. More details to follow – the one and only Professor Rob Briner will be giving this year's lecture, and Professor Alexandra Beaugard is the keynote in the afternoon. Both events will

be lively, thought provoking and a welcome opportunity to bring our community together.

*Professor Almuth McDowall
Head of Department*

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SAVE THE DATE: QUALITATIVE METHODS IN ACTION DAY

The [Qualitative Research Group](#) is delighted to be hosting its Annual Qualitative Methods in Action Day on 12 May 2022. The theme is 'Inclusive Research'.

The day will feature a mix of presentations and panel discussions by academic staff, recent PhD graduates and doctoral students from the department. Alumni are warmly welcome to attend, details and registration can be found [on our website](#).

SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS IN THEIR POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY

Academics in the department have been sharing insights from their research to support organisations to navigate the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr Halley Pontes shares [tips for managers on recognising and preventing burnout](#) in their teams on the Birkbeck blog, while Dr Kevin Teoh discusses [findings from research into junior doctors' mental health](#). Dr Rashi Dhensa-Kahlon explores the trauma of the pandemic and its impact on leaders in the workplace on [The Workplace Podcast](#).

In February, Professor Alexandra Beauregard presented 'Organisational responses to the pandemic: Working parents' lived experiences' at a Surrey Business School, Department of People and Organisations research seminar.

The department's guide on managing personal wellbeing in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is [available online](#).

PROF. JULIE GORE JOINS NATURALISTIC DECISION MAKING ASSOCIATION BOARD

Professor Julie Gore has been invited to join the [Naturalistic Decision Making Association](#) as part of their board.

Julie said: "For nearly four decades, the field of Naturalistic Decision Making (NDM) has been concerned with the study of how

people make decisions in complex real-world settings that can include dynamic, uncertain and continually changing conditions, and can require real-time decisions in urgent situations with significant consequences for mistakes. What we have learned about NDM has changed the way we train decision makers, the types of decision support we provide, and the way we design organizations."

The Naturalistic Decision Making Association is hosting an event, 'The World Needs Better Decision Makers', 10am – 2pm EST on 25 April. [Find out more and book your place](#).

COACHING PSYCHOLOGY STUDENT PRESENTS RESEARCH AT CONFERENCE



Victoria Burns, MSc Coaching Psychology presented her Master's research at the Oxford Brookes Coaching and Mentoring Research Conference in January 2022. Victoria's research asked, can coaching be emancipatory?

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

HOW EMPLOYERS CAN HELP SOLICITORS' WELLBEING

Law is one of the most popular degree choices, but does a legal career come at a cost, and what can employers do about it? Lucinda Soon, Solicitor and PhD student in Organizational Psychology, highlights key findings from her research.



Over the past five years, the well-being of solicitors in England and Wales has become a topic of growing concern. In part, this was triggered by the disciplinary case of [Sovani James](#), a junior solicitor who was struck off the Roll of Solicitors by the High Court for acting dishonestly at work, despite the Court acknowledging her behaviour may have arisen because of toxic work conditions and the stress she was under as a result. This decision sent a shockwave through the solicitors' profession, and an increased urgency developed to take the well-being of solicitors more seriously.

The [latest survey](#) by the Law Society of England and Wales on the well-being of its junior members revealed that over 90% felt stressed in their role, with almost 25% feeling severely or extremely stressed. Last year, a [study by the charity LawCare](#) reported considerable risks of burnout,

particularly relating to exhaustion. These reports point towards a problem, but there is little evidence of what factors might be contributing to it and how firms and organisations can help to address it. [In our study](#), we sought to shed some light on this. Drawing on self-determination theory, we investigated how solicitors' well-being might be affected by job autonomy, perceived belonging at work, feelings of competence, and levels of mindfulness. To do this, we analysed responses from an online survey of 340 trainee and qualified solicitors practising in England and Wales.

The ABCs of solicitors' well-being

According to self-determination theory, we all have three basic psychological needs which must be satisfied if we are to thrive at work. These are the needs for autonomy, belonging and competence. To help solicitors' well-being, do we need to go back to the basics of their ABCs? We found the more that solicitors felt satisfied in their autonomy, belonging and competence at work, the higher their well-being. This was observed regardless of gender, level of post-qualification experience (PQE), or type of organisation. In other words, common to all the solicitors we surveyed, feeling supported in their ABCs at work was important to their well-being.

Does mindfulness play a role?

Our study also found that solicitors with higher mindfulness experienced greater well-being. Again, this was the case regardless of gender, level of PQE, or where a solicitor worked, suggesting the benefit of mindfulness may be generally applied. Interestingly, not only did higher mindfulness alone correspond with greater well-being; solicitors who were more satisfied in their needs for autonomy,

belonging, and competence at work had higher levels of mindfulness. Having the basic ABC building blocks in place appeared to cultivate mindfulness, amplifying the well-being benefits for solicitors.

What does this mean for managers?

Our study points towards the importance of ensuring solicitors are satisfied in their ABCs at work. These basic and fundamental work factors play a direct role in their well-being and may also help to develop mindfulness to strengthen it even further. This places the work environment and work conditions of solicitors firmly into the spotlight. Solicitors need to feel they have autonomy, that they belong, and are supported and cared for at work. They equally need to feel they are competent and effective in their jobs. Without these basic elements, their well-being will suffer. Our findings raise the possibility that had Sovani James been supported by her firm in terms of her ABCs at work, her mental health may not have deteriorated to the extent that it did, resulting in the end of her legal career.

The impact of COVID-19 and beyond

The changing context of work arising from COVID-19 cannot be ignored. Remote working and a greater appreciation for more flexible ways of working may have given many solicitors more autonomy in terms of when, where, and how they work; however, it has also presented new challenges. Feelings of being connected and competent at work can be easily frustrated when solicitors work in isolation from colleagues, mentors, and leaders. This may be particularly so for trainees and junior solicitors, who are less experienced and may need more frequent support from others. Social-networking tools and virtual catchups can help solicitors feel connected and supported by their work community when

working from home. Likewise, regular access to learning and development opportunities, agreed channels for feedback, and effective supervision can all be achieved using technology to facilitate communications. Remembering the need for autonomy, management practices which respect individual circumstances are also critical. One size will not fit all. As the profession continues to adjust to a new hybrid way of working, being alive to the importance of solicitors' ABCs is a crucial starting point for all law firms and organisations looking to safeguard the well-being of their staff.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Colleagues presented research at a [Qualitative Research Symposium](#) hosted by the University of Bath in February 2022. Helen Cooper, Janet Sheath and Rebecca Whiting presented a paper entitled 'Emotional vulnerability: Counselling supervision services and ethical practice in qualitative research'. Dr Lilith Whiley and Dr Rhea Ashley Hoskin (University of Waterloo) presented the paper 'Femme Praxis: Using Femme Theory to foster vulnerability within research design and institutions.'
- **Dr Kevin Teoh** spoke to the Premier League about the use of psychometrics in the workplace on 24 February 2022. Kevin was also an invited guest on a series of podcasts:
 - ['What you weren't told about working as a junior doctor'](#) - BMJ Student Podcast, 17 February 2022.
 - ['Job Crafting – Empowering Employees to Make Change'](#) - Tap'd Solutions Podcast, 18 January 2022.
 - ['Promoting readiness for psych health and safety'](#) - Psych Health and Safety Podcast, 15 November 2021.

- Professor **Almuth McDowall** gave a keynote for alumni, staff and current pupils at Caterham School which was hosted at the Royal Academy of Engineering on 22 February 2022. Almuth also took part in an industry round table hosted by the Forum This Can Happen on 17 March 2022 on the topic of **Neurodiversity**.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

DR RASHI DHENSA-KAHLON



Dr Rashi Dhensa-Kahlon joined the department in Summer 2021. She shares her academic journey so far.

What's your #BBKStory?

I've always been interested in Psychology; it was my chosen subject at undergraduate and Master's level at the London School of Economics and I've always been curious about what makes people tick. Between my Master's and PhD, I worked as a consultant and trained as a Chartered Psychologist. I soon realised that I would be better placed

to help working people if I had more of an understanding of organizational psychology. When a role came up at Birkbeck, I jumped at the chance to apply and was so honoured to be accepted – I feel like I am even closer to doing what I am passionate about here than I've had the opportunity to do in the past. My research draws on clinical and social areas, asking how people recover from trauma, whether that's mistreatment at work or collective trauma like the COVID-19 pandemic.

What are you currently working on?

I'm currently finalising two papers looking at collective trauma. The first explores a range of traumatic contexts, including terrorist attacks and the COVID-19 pandemic, and asks to what extent the support we receive from others when we experience collective trauma helps or hinders. The second piece of research, which was funded by the Birkbeck Wellcome Trust ISSF Fund, is a longitudinal analysis exploring the impact of lockdowns on people's mental health. The findings show that lockdowns were particularly challenging for certain groups of people, for example women and young and older adults.

On the teaching side, I'm interim Programme Director for the evening MSc Organizational Psychology and I taught on the Life Career Development module last term. Birkbeck students make your job very fulfilling: they're very challenging, they want to know the theory but also how research impacts the world of work. It was one of the most enjoyable but toughest experiences of my teaching career so far – you're constantly kept on your toes! I'm also supervising a lot of professional doctorate students and will be teaching on the Evidence-Based HRM programme next term.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I have two children under the age of seven who keep me very busy. We do a lot of fun activities together like walking and baking. Being so interested in wellbeing, trauma and health, over the years I've taught myself to take care of those parts of my life. I practise mindfulness and keep fit with running and bootcamp military training – there's nothing like being out in all weathers and shouted at for the best part of an hour!

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

- Adamson, M., Muhr, S. L., & **Beauregard, T. A.** (2022). [Theorising work-life balance endeavours as a gendered project of the self: The case of senior executives in Denmark](#). Forthcoming in Human Relations.
- Fasbender, U., & **Drury, L.** (2021). [One plus one equals one: age-diverse friendship and its complex relation to employees' job satisfaction and turnover intentions](#). European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 1-14.
- Darken RP, Peterson B and **Gore J** (2022) [Editorial: Virtual Reality Applications in Military and Veteran Medicine and Healthcare](#). Frontiers in Virtual Reality. Frontiers in Psychology 3:856666.
- Lamont, R. A., Swift, H. J., & **Drury, L.** (2021). [Understanding Perceived Age-Based Judgement as a Precursor to Age-Based Stereotype Threat in Everyday Settings](#). Frontiers in Psychology, 12, 2062.
- **Dr Halley Pontes** and **Professor Almuth McDowall** co-authored a [brief discussion article](#) in the Addiction

journal discussing stigma in gaming research.

- **Dr Halley Pontes** published in the ABS four-star journal Social Science and Medicine a [study including over 120,000 gamers](#) from different countries to explore how much gaming is too much.
- **Soon, L., Walsh, J., McDowall, A., & Teoh, K.** (2021). [The Effects of Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction and Mindfulness on Solicitors' Well-being](#). International Journal of the Legal Profession, 1-16.
- Spiers, J., Buszewicz, M., Chew-Graham, C., Dunning, A., Taylor, A. K., Gopfert, A., van Hove, M., **Teoh, K.R.H.**, Appleby, L., Martin, J., & Riley, R. (2021). [What challenges did junior doctors face while working during the COVID-19 pandemic? A qualitative study](#). BMJ Open, 11(12), e056122.
- Vasconcelos, A.G., Lima, E.P., **Teoh, K.**, Nascimento, E., MacLennan S., & Cox, T. (2021) [Work-related factors in the aetiology of symptoms of post-traumatic stress among First Responders: The Brazilian Firefighters Longitudinal Health Study \(FLoHS\)](#). Cadernos de Saúde Pública, 37, e00135920.



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