



Institute for research into organisations, work and employment



Welcome to the fourth issue of the iROWE newsletter, in which we share with you the latest research and developments within the world of organisations, work and employment.

iROWE's staff continue to be awarded funding to carry out their research, and the latest projects cover areas such as: the effect of union learning on conflict; downsizing in the private sector; mediation in the service industry; contemporary dispute resolution; clinical engagement amongst GPs.

The results of previous research projects are now available, and throughout the newsletter members share their findings on :Employee engagement and communication (p 3); Lean Production in higher education (p3); downsizing envoys (p 4); internal communication (p 4); individual dispute resolution (p 6); and an entrepreneurial approach in healthcare (p 7).

Our ever popular seminar series has included a diverse range of topics. In October Ian Ashman discussed the experiences of envoys in the face to face delivery of downsizing initiatives in UK public sector organisations. David Vickers explained the impact of 'nonhumans', such as policies and procedures on Strategic HR, in November.

In January we had a panel of experts including: Bill Adams, Secretary of Yorks and Humber TUC; John Crawley, Mediator and Founder of John Crawley Mediation Ltd; Mike Green, HR Director at Sherwin Williams Protective & Marine EMEA; Gary Lovatt, Chair of Lancashire and Cumbria, Federation of Small Business; and Oliver McCann, Partner in Employment at Napthens Solicitors. They gave their views on the Government's proposed approach to dispute resolution and employment law, and this was followed by a lively debate.

March saw a discussion on 'Leadership in difficult times', with viewpoints provided by iROWE members Ian Ashman and Steve Willcocks, and Dr John Lawler from the University of Bradford. Mary Welch then provided an insight into the impact of workplace communication on organisational engagement, in April, and encouraged the audience to consider the impact of communication on engagement levels of the people working in their organisation. Please see page 8 for details of forthcoming seminars.

We will also be running a series of conferences exploring conflict in the workplace at Universities throughout the UK starting in October this year. This is the first time in the UK academics, practitioners and policy makers will be encouraged to come together to discuss individual workplace conflict and resolution. For more details of this prestigious ESRC seminar series see page 2.

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iROWE seeks to encourage the conduct and dissemination of high quality academic research into organisations, work and employment. In addition i-ROWE will work closely with employers, government and trade unions in order to inform the development of effective workplace practice and employment policy

Workplace conflict-ESRC Seminar Series



iROWE have recently won funding from the ESRC to host a prestigious series of seminars. The theme of the series will be 'Reframing Resolution - Managing Conflict and Resolving Individual Employment Disputes in the Contemporary Workplace'.

Recent years have seen increased concern over a perceived rise in individual workplace conflict. As a result, the resolution of individual employment disputes has become a crucial issue. This seminar series hosted by iROWE brings together, for the first time in the UK, academic researchers, policy-makers and practitioners to explore workplace dispute resolution and the management of conflict. This ESRC seminar series, is also supported by Department of BIS, Acas, CBI, TUC, BCC, CIPD and a number of mediation providers (CMP Resolutions, Consensio Partners and the TCM Group, and Globis)

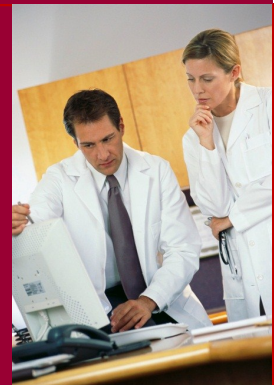
Each seminar will be held at a different university across the UK and will focus on a different aspect of workplace conflict such as legal regulation, mediation and employee voice :

- 3rd OCTOBER 2012. Workplace conflict: Understanding workplace conflict and conceptualising individual employment disputes. University of Strathclyde
- DECEMBER 2012. Workplace conflict: The changing face of legal regulation – rights, resolution and efficiency. The University of Warwick
- FEBRUARY 2013. Workplace conflict: Mediation and alternative dispute resolution – outcomes and impacts. Swansea University
- APRIL 2013. Workplace conflict: The management of workplace conflict – structures, systems and strategies. Queen's University Belfast
- JUNE 2013. Workplace conflict: Resolving workplace disputes – employee voice, engagement and representation. University of Central Lancashire
- SEPTEMBER 2013. Workplace conflict: Managing conflict and resolving disputes - synthesising research, practice and policy. University of Westminster

More information about the series will be available soon on the iROWE website:
http://www.uclan.ac.uk/schools/lbs/research/research_institutes/irowe.php

Researching clinical engagement among GPs

Ian Ashman and Steve Willcocks are currently evaluating the future for clinical engagement among GPs in East Lancashire. The aim of clinical engagement is "to involve clinicians more in decisions on how health services are developed and delivered in the future" (Hussey 2007, p3). However, a problem in the NHS in recent years has been a resistance within the general practitioner community to the idea of clinical engagement. Yet, the current policy agenda will require GPs to be more involved in leadership and commissioning practices. In East Lancashire, a shadow Clinical Commissioning Group, (CCG), has been set up, linked to these policy changes. However, as elsewhere in the NHS, there may be perceived differences in terms of the GPs' readiness and willingness to engage with the CCG in a leadership and commissioning role.



The research will therefore aim to develop a better understanding of how clinical engagement operates in practice and how it can be best applied to facilitate the success of the introduction of CCGs. The study has been awarded funding of nearly £30,000 by East Lancashire PCT, and will take place over the next two years. Findings will be reported in due course. For more information about the project please contact Ian Ashman on iashman@uclan.ac.uk or Steve Willcocks on swillcocks@uclan.ac.uk

Employee engagement and communication presentation in Finland

Mary Welch was recently invited to Finland to speak about the communication implications of employee engagement. An internationally acknowledged internal communication researcher, Mary has developed a conceptual model of the relationship between communication and employee engagement. She joined David Stoneham, Nokia's director of communications at Aalto University's annual *International Business Communication Evening Seminar* in Helsinki.

Mary discussed the evolution of employee engagement, and the role of communication in enhancing employee engagement. Her presentation encouraged the audience of communication practitioners and researchers to consider potential engagement effects of communication strategies and tactics, alongside the communication need of employees. David described employee communications as being particularly challenging for businesses. He sees the number one role of internal communication as creating a clear line of sight. Both presenters were agreed on the significance and complexity of internal communication, and on its impact on employee engagement.

The event was hosted by Aalto University's Department of Communication in the School of Economics. Seminar convener, Professor Leena Louhiala-Salminen described the seminar topic as a hot issue. The event attracted a record audience with more than 70 people.



Lean Production in higher education

Emma Thirkhell recently wrote an article on Lean Production in higher education for *ProcessFix*. She explained that there has been a lack of research on how employees affect Lean process improvement, despite as she argues the inability to deliver lean without their involvement.

In higher education, Emma found that the challenge in implementing lean is that it can be counter-intuitive to traditional approaches, for instance Lecturers are applauded for their innovation and knowledge, whereas Lean tends to streamline that kind of thinking. As a result, she believes that the higher education approach to Lean training needs to be very different – people need to be allowed to use their own skills and knowledge to take things forward, rather than the step by step six sigma approach. She suggests that developing pockets of academics who could facilitate others – at a peer to peer level – would support the transfer of Lean into higher education.

In general she advises that for any organisation thinking about introducing Lean is to adapt the training and introduction of the model to ensure it is relevant for their staff. Emma will shortly be undertaking research into lean production in other public sector organisations, and we will keep you updated on her findings. For more information please contact Emma on ethirkell@uclan.ac.uk. The article will shortly be available at: <http://www.processfix.com/news-and-events/quarterly-newsletter.aspx>

New report on downsizing envoys

Dr Ian Ashman's report on downsizing envoys, titled 'The nature of bad news infects the teller' has just been published by acas. This report explores the experiences of public sector employees that have been given the task of delivering the generally bad news of downsizing decisions face to face with the victims and then deal with the immediate repercussions. For the purposes of this study the people fulfilling such a role have been labelled 'downsizing envoys'.

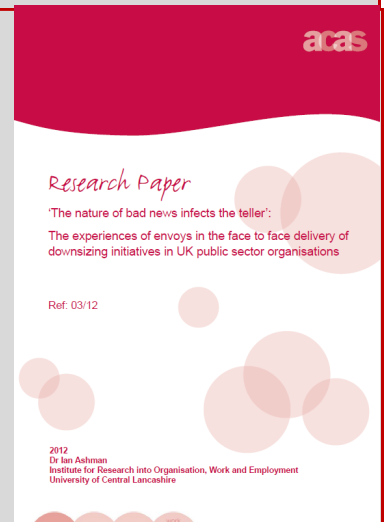
Key findings from the report

- Heavy emotional demands are made on envoys
- Public sector context may have a specific effect on the experiences of envoys, such as political pressures and the absence of clear downsizing rationale.
- Characteristics of public sector workers, such as their public service ethic - tend to heighten the emotional aspects of the envoy role.
- Certain occupations are protected from downsizing, creating a disproportionate effect on those that are not.
- Lengthy consultation periods and voluntary severance often extends the duration of downsizing activity and so can prolong the envoys' emotional discomfort.
- Envoys require training, preparation and support in their role and this is not always available
- The envoy role requires a distinct set of abilities and prior experience acts as an important mediator in how the role is undertaken.
- The relational dynamic between the HR function and other organisational functions can cause a tension, based on different goal orientations, which has an impact on how envoys perceive and carry out their task with concern regarding different perceptions of procedure, fairness and goal displacement.

This acas funded report is part of a series of research into downsizing envoys, and he is currently working on a comparative study drawing on evidence from the private sector. If you would like to discuss the findings or issues raised please contact Ian on IAshman@Uclan.ac.uk

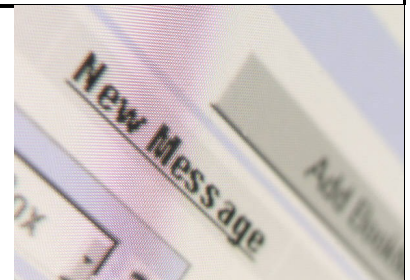
The report is now available at:

http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/b/f/0312_Downsizing_envoys_Ashman.pdf



Latest research on internal communication

Dr Mary Welch has just published the results of a study into workplace communication. The potential benefits of internal communication rely on appropriate messages reaching employees in formats useful and acceptable to them. The paper investigates employee views in one organisation on the format of internal publications. It shows that electronic methods were preferred by the employees who participated in the survey; followed by blended methods (electronic and print); and lastly, print internal communication formats.



However, the findings also suggest that it would be dangerous for communicators to assume that employees share uniform preferences for internal communication media. This implies that provision of alternative formats is necessary to enable employees to choose media they find most acceptable, appropriate and usable. If the media which is carrying the message is not acceptable to employees, the message has little chance of being attended to or acted upon.

To discuss the research please contact Mary via email MWelch@uclan.ac.uk

The paper entitled 'Appropriateness and acceptability: Employee perspectives of internal communication' is available by subscription from *Public Relations Review* at:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0363811111002128>

Conferences presented at by iROWE

Emma Thirkell gave a paper on 'Lean in Services and Higher Education' at Lean in HE: Transformations at Portsmouth University .

Mary Welch was an invited speaker at Employee engagement: Evolution and communication implications. "Focus on Internal Communication" *International Business Communication Evening Seminar*. Department of Communication, Aalto University, Helsinki.



Welch, M (2011) Appropriateness and acceptability: Employee perspectives of internal communication. *18th BledCom Conference: Internal Communication*, Slovenia.

Mary Welch was an invited panellist - BledCom Round Table panel discussion: *Internal communication education*. *18th BledCom Internal Communication conference*, Slovenia.

Mary Welch was an invited speaker - Internal communication: A stakeholder approach. *Study day of the academic research contact group FNRS on internal communication*. Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium.

Ian Ashman attended Contradictions in Public Management Managing in Volatile Times, *IRSPM (International Research Society for Public Management) Conference*, University of Rome, and gave a paper on 'Envoys not executioners : the face to face delivery of downsizing initiatives in public sector organisations'

Forthcoming presentations

Douglas Martin will be presenting a paper on "The challenge of Lean and the trade union response: a case study in the UK Civil Service" at the BUIRA Conference June 28 to 30 at University of Bradford.

Ian Ashman has been accepted to give a paper on "Managing downsizing change: A comparison of envoys in the public and private sectors" at the BAM Conference, 11-12th September at Cardiff University.

Emma Thirkell will also be presenting at BAM with Carolyn Ward on "Lean Leadership for Change", and with Mark Robinson on "Rapid Improvement Events and Employee Perceptions: development or dismissal?"

New iROWE research project

Tony Bennett has recently secured joint funding of £4000 from the Universities Forum for HRD and TUC Unionlearn North West for a project exploring the relationship between union initiated learning in the workplace and the reduction of conflict within organisations.

Fieldwork started in April and a report will be presented at a dissemination event in late November. Details of which will be promoted at a later date on our website : http://www.uclan.ac.uk/schools/lbs/research/research_institutes/irowe.php



Findings on individual dispute resolution

Building on research by iROWE into dispute resolution in the public sector, Richard Saundry and Gemma Wibberley have recently undertaken a project investigating these issues in the private sector. The study funded by acas, examined conflict from the perspective of operational managers, HR managers and TU representatives in Shop Direct Group (SDG) a large retail organisation.



Key findings from this case study:

- The importance of good relationships and trust between HR, line managers and TU representatives to enable informal resolution, which can be challenged when the HR function becomes more remote.
- Patterns of dispute are linked to context, with variation between different: areas of the business; job roles; and demographic groups of employees.
- Operational managers now have more responsibility for discipline and grievance issues, yet they do not always have the skills or confidence or experience in dealing with such issues. Therefore they may avoid addressing problems or alternatively deal with them by rigidly applying procedures, neither of which reflected the company's ideal of informal resolution
- Although HR have shifted to more of an advisory role in an official capacity, they still played a vital role in regulating the management of conflict and coaching line managers in dealing with people issues.
- There was no formal mediation scheme in this organisation, and many participants questioned the value of such a scheme, but often utilised some of the principles of mediation informally and found these beneficial.
- The company has well established employee engagement strategies and participants felt this enabled them to identify issues early on and deal with them informally.
- In the operational areas of the business where performance management systems were used regularly and in detail by line managers this enabled them to identify and discuss problems with their staff at an early stage, and also highlighted line managers' ability to manage their staff to more senior management



This report is now published on the acas website : http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/b/i/0512_Managing_individual_conflict_in_the_private_sector.pdf

We have also recently undertaken research into these issues in a non-unionised company, and will discuss the findings from this in the next newsletter. For more information on either of these projects please contact rasaundry@uclan.ac.uk.

Join iROWE

iROWE is a new research institute located within Lancashire Business School at the University of Central Lancashire. It provides a forum for the development and dissemination of high quality research into organisations, work and employment. Its work will have a particular emphasis on policy and practice—in short research that will have an impact and make a difference.

Therefore, iROWE brings together academics, managers, HR professionals, union representatives and policy makers. If you would like to be part of this exciting institute and kept at the forefront of research then become an ASSOCIATE MEMBER. This FREE membership is open to all those with a professional interest in organisations, work or employment. Benefits include: research e-newsletter, regular free seminars by key speakers in the field, consultancy opportunities for your organization, and networking.

To join just email Gemma Wibberley at gwibberley@uclan.ac.uk

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Recent iROWE publications

Elmer P (2011) Public relations and storytelling in Edwards L and Hodges C (eds) *Public Relations: Society and Culture*, Abingdon, Routledge

Ashman, I. (2012) 'The nature of bad news infects the teller': the experiences of envoys in the face to face delivery of downsizing initiatives in UK public sector organisations, London, Acas. 03/12

Welch, M. (2011) The evolution of the employee engagement concept: communication implications. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. Vol. 16 No. 4 pp. 328-346.
DOI: [10.1108/135632811111186968](https://doi.org/10.1108/135632811111186968)

Ruck, K. and Welch, M. (2012) Valuing internal communication; management and employee perspectives. *Public Relations Review*. Early cite : <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0363811111002116>

Willcocks, S. G. (2012) The entrepreneurial role in primary care dentistry, *British Dental Journal*, Vol. 212: , No .5, pp. 213-217

Willcocks, S. G. (2011) Understanding strategy, change and leadership in health and social care in the UK, *Journal of Integrated Care.*, Vol. 19, No.6, pp.23-32

Saundry, R. and Wibberley, G. (2012) *Managing individual conflict in the private sector – a case study*, London, Acas. 05/12

Willcocks, S. G. (2011) Identifying Clinical Leadership Functions in the NHS, *British Journal of Health Care Management*, Vol.17, No.3, pp. 96-100

Thirkhell, E. (2012) 'Spotlight: Emma Thirkell, Lecturer in Human Resource Management, University of Central Lancashire.' ProcessFix, Spring Newsletter, <http://www.processfix.com/news-and-events/quarterly-newsletter.aspx>

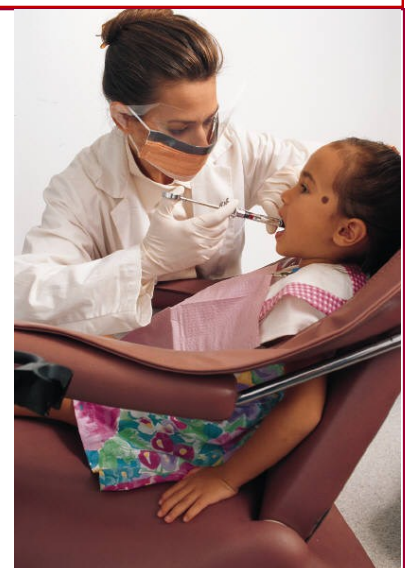
Willcocks, S.G. (2011) Leadership theory: Implications for developing dental surgeons in primary care?, *British Dental Journal*. Vol. 210, pp. 105 - 107



The need for an entrepreneurial approach

Steve Willcocks has just published a paper on the need for dentists to take an entrepreneurial approach to their practice. He explains that due to policy reforms and changes in dentistry it will be important for dentists to consider the business side of dental practice, alongside the importance of meeting the needs of patients. Steve believes that quality, creativity and innovation will be particularly important aspects for dentists to focus on.

For more information please contact Steve on SGWillcocks@uclan.ac.uk. The article is called 'The entrepreneurial role in primary care dentistry' and is published in the *British Dental Journal*, and is available by subscription at:
<http://www.nature.com/bdj/journal/v212/n5/full/sj.bdj.2012.177.html>



FREE Seminar Programme— 2011 –2012

Wednesday, 16th May

Peter Monaghan
Acting Area Director, ACAS

'Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) at Work, Options, Appropriateness and the Business Case'

In this seminar, Peter Monaghan, the Acting Area Director of Acas will look at the case for alternative dispute resolution and the role that Acas can play in helping organisations and individuals resolve disputes before they escalate into employment tribunal claims. In particular, Peter will examine the potential of pre-claim conciliation, a central part of government proposals to encourage the early settlement of disputes.

All seminars will be held at UCLAN. They will start at 5.30 pm and finish at approximately 7pm. Free teas and coffees will be provided. If you wish to book a place please don't hesitate to contact Gemma Wibberley at gwibberley@uclan.ac.uk.

A new series is currently being developed for the next academic year, information will be available on our website http://www.uclan.ac.uk/schools/lbs/research/research_institutes/irowe_events.php

A previous iROWE seminar by Adrian Wright



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