

News in brief

- iROWE Research Paper examines the evidence on workplace mediation
- New project looks at the redundancy process from the managers' perspective
- Survey finds evidence that union learning representatives have a positive impact on workplace skills

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Research News

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Welcome to iRowe!

Welcome to the first issue of the iROWE newsletter—a quarterly publication that will keep you up to date with everything happening within the Institute.

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, man-

agers, HR professionals, union representatives and policy makers.

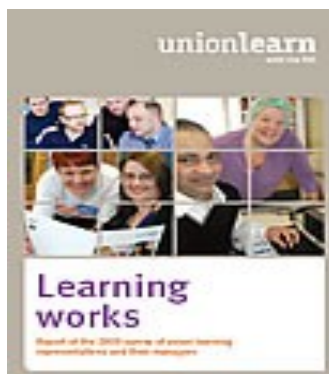
i-ROWE researchers have interests in a range of areas such as: dispute resolu-

tion and conflict management ethics, and corporate communications. In addition iROWE PhD students are currently exploring topics including diversity, performance management and workplace discipline.

Strategic direction will be provided by an advisory board made up of leading individuals from business, government and trade unions.

A crucial aspect of the institute is its associate membership. This is open to all those with a professional interest in organisations, work and employment.

To join iROWE just email rasaundry@uclan.ac.uk



Recent research from iROWE

tion and conflict management, management strategy, redundancy, manage-

Is Mediation The Answer?

A new iROWE discussion paper has argued that the most significant impact of mediation may lie in its ability to change the attitudes and behaviours of managers, HR professionals and trade union representatives.

In the wake of the Gibbons Review into dispute resolution, increased policy emphasis has been placed on workplace mediation as a way of avoiding costly

grievances, disciplinary cases and employment tribunal claims.

However, in a comprehensive review of the academic and policy-based research on the subject, Lisa Banks and Richard Saundry warn against seeing mediation as panacea for all workplace conflict.

In fact they suggest that there are key barriers that may hamper the widespread adoption of work-

place mediation. Furthermore mediation may be limited in its applicability to disciplinary disputes.

However, they argue that there is growing evidence that the introduction of in-house mediation schemes can improve management conflict handling skills and may act as a catalyst in changing the way in which all parties approach employment disputes.

For more information contact Richard Saundry at rasaundry@uclan.ac.uk

Up in the Air? New Research on Redundancy



Dr Ian Ashman

"it is a psychologically demanding (often traumatic) role and yet there is no study of it in the UK and no advice on how to cope with it "

A full copy of the report can be obtained from union learn at the following web address:

<http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/>



A great deal has been written about the impact of organisational downsizing, but it seems that the experiences of one important group of people have been largely ignored so far. Ian Ashman is undertaking a research project that will explore the effect of downsizing activities on the people who have to deliver the bad news in a **face to face** interaction – a category of employee that he has labelled the downsizing 'envoys'.

Most organisations over their history have undertaken downsizing in some shape or form and in to-

day's economic climate the incidences are on the increase so the 'envoy' role is not trivial in terms of either numbers or impact. Quite obviously it is a psychologically demanding (often traumatic) role and yet there is no study of it in the UK and no advice on how to cope with it in the practitioner literature.

Issues that may be important include the emotional management of the 'envoy' role, preparation for the role, coping strategies, organisational/professional support and impact on work/life balance.

Downsizing 'envoys' may be drawn from anywhere – HR professionals, outside consultants, line managers and, perhaps, elsewhere. Ian would be interested to hear from anybody who has experience (however limited) of delivering (crucially) **face to face** downsizing and is prepared to share it for the purposes of this important project.

If you are interested in participating in the project, please don't hesitate to contact Ian at iashman@uclan.ac.uk.

'Union learning works', say researchers

A team of i-ROWE researchers have found that the activity of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) is having a major impact on UK workplaces. Not only does ULR activity increase the chances of workers accessing learning opportunities but it also had key benefits for organisations in terms of reduced skills gaps, improved morale and better employment relations. However, the ability of ULRs to help workers is critically dependent on the level of employer support

Richard Saundry, Alison Hollinrake and Val Antcliff conducted the 2009 national survey of union learning representatives on behalf of union learn with the TUC. They found that three-quarters of union learning reps have helped arrange courses for their colleagues and almost half have obtained funding for learning.

The survey also shows that ULRs are playing an increasingly significant role in providing work-related learning and training. Almost two-thirds of managers reported that ULR activity had increased the provision of basic literacy and numeracy skills and a majority agreed that there had been increases in job-related training and courses leading to qualifications.

Nearly three-quarters of ULRs claimed to have recruited or helped to recruit new members into their union. The vast majority are happy to continue as ULRs and say that they get sufficient support from their union and unionlearn.

The findings also point to important benefits for organisations. The authors explain that: 'While most managers highlighted the role played by ULRs in increasing awareness and generating enthusiasm for learning, a number also cited their ability to reach groups who have traditionally been resistant to learning and also the positive impact of ULR activity on staff

morale and management union relationships. Two-thirds of ULRs reported that their activity improved management/union dialogue and almost 60 per cent said that it improved management/union relationships in general.'

However, there are crucial obstacles to effective ULR activity. Typically ULRs have to use their own time to assist their colleagues with learning. While the majority receive reasonable time-off, most are then expected to make-up the work that they have missed.

The report said: 'Where formal learning agreements were in place and also where management and unions had entered into a learning partnership, ULRs were more positive about the attitudes of employers and were more likely to report increasing activity. This was particularly evident where employers had signed the Skills Pledge. In short there appeared to be a virtuous circle of employer commitment, ULR activity and improved training outcomes.'

Professionalization in the NHS



Dr. Pete Thomas and Dr. Jan Hewitt have recently had a paper accepted for publication in *Organization Studies*, one of the world's highest ranked management and organization studies journals. The paper, which will be published next year, focuses on the relations between medical professionals and managers in the NHS and proposes a new theoretical framework for analysing and understanding the professionalization process in contemporary organizations.

Relations between doctors and managers are an important issue for the NHS

of professions and the maintenance of boundaries between professions and occupational groups can be better understood by seeing the process as discursively constructed. The paper examines fieldwork based in a UK Primary Care Trust, exploring the ways in which clinical professionals and managers interact and attempt to control situations in which they can present themselves as 'professionals'. The framework sees the process as being underpinned by a struggle to make

Tapping into recent thinking on the sociology of the professions, the paper is based on concepts from social theory and discourse analysis, and argues that the development

discursive assertions about what is and isn't professional. The paper argues that traditional conceptualizations of professionalism need to be modified to acknowledge the rhetorical strategies employed by professionals and those with professional aspirations.

Drs Thomas and Hewitt are currently developing an ESRC grant bid which will be based on the conceptual framework and will focus on the managerial/professional relations within Higher Education. It is hoped that a one year programme of fieldwork will begin in September 2011. If you would like more information on any of this work please contact Pete at pthomas@uclan.ac.uk.

“traditional conceptualizations of professionalism need to be modified to acknowledge the rhetorical strategies employed by professionals”

HR management —a political process?

With a few exceptions most research into management infers that 'management' are all singing from the same hymn sheet. Managers are seen and referred to as a homogeneous mass that behave strategically and make decisions in the interests of profit maximisation for their business.

Most practitioners know this is not the case from their own experiences but this approach still dominates the academic and practitioner based literature. Research conducted by Dr David Vickers from iROWE and Professor Steve Fox from Lancaster University has cast new light on this important issue.

Their latest paper ('Towards practice-based studies of HRM: an

actor-network and communities of practice informed approach) which was published in May in the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* reports on findings from an 18-month longitudinal study of HRM-in practice and examines HR work in the context of management activities following an acquisition of 'Burnsland', a large petrochemical plant.

The research not only demonstrates that HR practice is a highly political management process but also shows how, in the case discussed, it involves complex micro-political and interactional calculations, and sensitive assessments of the value of different human contributions to the overall value-chain of a firm. This is in stark

contrast with approaches which downplay the political aspect of HR. The paper describes and critically analyzes the way networks were created, extended, maintained, undermined and overturned within one organization. In doing so, it shows inequalities of power both: (a) being generated through interactions which built new networks; and (b) being used to undermine established network-effects in a locally situated context.

If you would like further information on this research please contact David at davickers@uclan.ac.uk.



Dr David Vickers

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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

Seminar Programme—2010/11

24th November 2010

Downsizing from a different perspective

Dr Ian Ashman

Ian Ashman will discuss the early results of a research project looking at the effect of downsizing activities on the people who have to deliver the bad news.

19th January 2011

Mediation and trade unions

Dr Richard Saundry

Richard Saundry will draw on research commissioned by Acas to look at the implications for trade unions of the extension of workplace mediation.

16th February 2011

Professionalization and management

**Dr Jan Hewitt and Dr
Pete Thomas**

Jan Hewitt and Pete Thomas will report key findings from their research into the relations between managers and medical professionals within the NHS.

16th March 2011

HR, performance and critical realism

Dr Anthony Hesketh

Anthony Hesketh from Lancaster University will discuss his research (conducted with Steve Fleetwood) and their recent book 'Explaining the Performance of Human Resource Management'.

13th April 2011

**A Battle for Control – HR Practitioners
and the Management of Discipline**

Dr Carol Jones

Carol Jones will report on research findings that shed new light on the relationship between line managers and HR practitioners.

11th May 2011

**Union Learning – The Role of Employers
and Institutions**

Alison Hollinrake

Alison Hollinrake draws on the recent 2009 survey of union learning representatives to examine the way in which employer support impacts on the activity and impact of union learning representatives.

All seminars will be held in Greenbank Building Room 348. They will start at 5.30 pm and finish at approximately 7pm. If you wish to book a place at any of the above, please don't hesitate to contact Richard Saundry at rasaundry@uclan.ac.uk.