

# PhD Studentship

Exploring informal processes in the workplace to develop contemporary career interventions, using a reconceptualised framework of career success.

Closing date: Friday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2017

Interview date: May 2017 (date TBC)

## Supervisory team

### *Director of Studies:*

[Dr Kazia Solowiej](#), Senior Lecturer in Occupational Psychology, Institute of Health & Society, University of Worcester

### *Supervisors:*

[Dr Catharine Ross](#), Senior Lecturer in Human Resource Management, Worcester Business School, University of Worcester

[Professor Jan Francis-Smythe](#), Director of Research, Worcester Business School, University of Worcester

## Context

The distinction between formal and informal organisational processes has been an overarching theme within the careers literature for many years (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). Formal processes are defined by structure, policies, procedures, strategies and objectives designed by managers that can be assessed objectively and changed relatively rapidly (Gulati & Puranam, 2009). In contrast, informal processes refer to the social, subjective structures that influence how employees work together, comprising of behaviours, attitudes, interactions, norms and networks that are embedded in the culture of organisations (de Toni & Nonino, 2010; Wyatt & Silvester, 2015). These concepts are becoming increasingly important to individual perceptions of career development and success, as the experience of both formal and informal processes are thought to be key factors that will influence an individual's willingness to participate in career development activities (Kim, 2005).

A study by Solowiej (2014) found that males in female-dominated occupations emphasised the importance of informal processes in the work environment that contributed to their achievement of career success, including opportunities to socialise and build relationships with work colleagues, opportunities to collaborate with colleagues or give/receive informal support, informal recognition and feedback from work colleagues, and flexibility to achieve success in other areas of life. These findings lead to the development of a framework of career success, outlining key themes of personal, professional, social and life success, that warrants further exploration of its application in other occupational contexts. This framework is supportive of Marchington and Suter (2013) who emphasise the importance of informality at work, as it is often through social interaction that individuals are more likely to hear about workplace development opportunities, as well as providing a platform to develop valuable relationships with work colleagues (Shore, Taylor, Coyle-Shapiro, & Tetrick, 2004). Moreover, Boxall, Haynes and Freeman (2007) indicate that systems that promote informality in the workplace have the potential to enhance trust, satisfaction, commitment and success.

Despite this, studies that explore the value of informal processes and social interaction in relation to career success appear to be limited, yet this is an important avenue of research to expand on current perceptions that many organisations rely on formal objective measures as part of isolated events to identify individual needs (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Van der Rijt, 2012). As a result, Hoogervorst, van der Flier and Koopman (2004) emphasise potential negative consequences of poor communication and interventions that are ineffective in supporting career development and success, which has important implications for individuals who enter occupations with personal motivations and expectations in relation to their own definitions of career success.

The studentship will aim to address the gap in the literature that suggests organisations are yet to recognise the value of utilising informal processes within the work environment that may be effective for supporting development and the achievement of career success. Additionally, the proposed research will seek to explore the value of informal processes in relation to perceptions of career success using the reconceptualised framework of career success developed by Solowiej (2014), to contribute to the careers evidence-base and inform contemporary organisational career development practices. It is anticipated that a qualitative methodology will be utilised to provide the basis for developing, implementing and evaluating a contemporary career intervention, as appropriate.

### Further Reading

- Boxall, P., Haynes, P., & Freeman, R. (2007). *What Workers Say: Employee Voice in the Anglo-American Workplace*. New York, US: Cornell University Press.
- Coetzee, M., Bergh, Z., & Schreuder, D. (2010). The influence of career orientations on subjective work experiences. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*. 8 (1), 279-292.
- de Toni, A.F. & Nonino, F. (2010). The key roles in the informal organisation: a network analysis perspective. *The Learning Organisation*. 17 (1), 86-103.
- Grant, A.M., & Ashford, S.J. (2008). The dynamics of proactivity at work. *Research in Organizational Behaviour*. 28, 3-34.
- Gulati, R. & Puranam, P. (2009). Renewal through reorganisation: the value of inconsistencies between formal and informal organisation. *Organisation Science*. 20 (2), 422-440.
- Hoogervorst, J., van der Flier, H., & Koopman, P. (2004). Implicit communication in organisations, the impact of culture, structure and management practices on employee behaviour. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*. 19 (3), 288-311.
- Kim, N. (2005). Organizational interventions influencing employee career development preferred by different career success orientations. *International Journal of Training and Development*. 9 (1), 47-61.
- Marchington, M., & Suter, J. (2013). Where informality really matters: patterns of employee involvement and participation (EIP) in a non-union firm. *Industrial Relations*. 52 (S1), 284-313.
- Shore, L., Taylor, S., Coyle-Shapiro, J., & Tetrick, L. (2004). *The Employment Relationship: Examining Psychological and Contextual Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Solowiej, K. (2014). *A case study of career success: male employees in two public sector, female-dominated occupations*. PhD thesis, University of Worcester, UK, Retrieved from <http://eprints.worc.ac.uk/4064/>.
- Solowiej, K., Ross, C., Francis-Smythe, J., & Steele, C. (2014). Understanding career success from employee and organisational perspectives: A case study of males in two female-dominated occupations. *Proceedings of the BPS Division of Occupational Psychology (DOP) Annual Conference 2014*, Brighton.

Wyatt, M. & Silvester, J. (2015). Reflections on the labyrinth: investigating black and minority ethnic leaders' career experiences. *Human Relations*. 68 (8), 1243-1269.

Van der Rijt, J., van der Wiel, M., Van den Bossche, P., Segers, M.S.R. & Gijssels, W.H. (2012). Contextual antecedents of informal feedback in the workplace. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*. 23 (2), 233-257.

### **The University of Worcester**

Research at the University of Worcester has grown significantly over the last 10 years. This growth is most clearly shown in the outcomes of the Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014). Worcester was the most improved University in the UK based on Research Fortnight's "Research Power" measure, reflecting a more than four-fold increase in the number of staff submitted compared to RAE 2008 and a commensurate increase in the quality of the research. As a consequence of its REF 2014 submission, Worcester's QR income for 2015-16 is up by 341% from 2014-15.

The University is committed to further developing its research profile in the coming period, through a strategic approach to its support for and investment in research. As part of this investment it is funding a number of full-time PhD studentships in its areas of particular research strength.

### **The Institute of Health and Society**

The successful candidate will join the Institute of Health and Society, a dynamic, multi-professional department that has experienced dramatic growth in recent years, particularly in research output. Staff in the Institute contribute to the development of knowledge and practice by engaging in a wide range of research and consultancy activities. Working in collaboration with different disciplines and with other universities, private industry and the public sector, research is always grounded in the aim of achieving real-life benefits.

Director of Studies, Dr Kazia Solowiej, is based in the Institute of Health and Society and has research and supervision expertise in careers, career success and development.

The supervisory team includes Professor Jan Francis-Smythe and Dr Catharine Ross who are based in Worcester Business School. Professor Jan Francis-Smythe has research and supervisory expertise in careers and individual differences in the workplace. Dr Catharine Ross has research and supervisory expertise in careers with a particular interest in diversity.

### **Research School**

The Research School is a focal point for all our research students. It provides:

- day-to-day support for our students, both administrative and practical, through our dedicated team
- a Research Student Study Space with both PCs and laptop docking station
- a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme for students and their supervisors
- a programme of student-led conferences and seminars

### **Details of the studentship**

During the period of your studentship you will receive the following:

- a tax free bursary of £13,863 for a period of 3 years
- a fee-waiver for 4 years
- a laptop
- use of the Research Student Study Space in the Research School
- access to the Research Student Support Scheme

**Qualifications needed**

Applicants should address and provide evidence for each of the essential and desirable criteria as part of the personal statement.

**Essential:**

Applicants should have or be able to evidence:

- A First or Upper Second class Honours degree in Psychology or other relevant discipline, or expect to receive one by October 2017;
- A sound understanding of qualitative and quantitative research methods and an interest in occupational psychology and careers;
- Ability to design research studies;
- Academic writing skills in English;
- Ability to organise and meet deadlines;
- Good interpersonal skills;
- Ability to work independently and contribute to a team;
- Commitment and an enthusiastic approach to completing a higher research degree.

**Desirable:**

- Education to Masters degree level in Psychology or other relevant discipline;
- Experience of appropriate research methods and skills;
- Ability to travel independently (e.g. for data collection/conference attendance).

As part of its mission statement the University is committed to widening participation for its higher degrees. Although it is desirable for candidates to hold a Masters degree, the University is happy to accept applications from candidates with relevant professional qualifications and work related experience.

**The Interview**

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to interview. The interview will provisionally be held in May 2017, date to be confirmed. You will be asked to make a short presentation on a topic related to the study. You will also be asked to provide an example of your written work (e.g. a dissertation) ahead of the interview.

**For further information** or an informal discussion on this project, please contact Dr Kazia Solowiej (Director of Studies) via telephone on +44 (0)1905 855565 or by email [k.solowiej@worc.ac.uk](mailto:k.solowiej@worc.ac.uk)

**Application forms are available at:**

<http://www.worcester.ac.uk/researchstudentships>

Completed application forms should be sent by email to: [research@worc.ac.uk](mailto:research@worc.ac.uk) or sent via post to: Research School, Jenny Lind Building, Henwick Grove, St Johns, Worcester, WR2 6AJ