

Seminar Speakers and Abstracts

Seminar A- 'Workplace Learning' at Room D174, 1330-1500 on 29 May 2012

Chair: Professor Lynne Chisholm

A1: Workplace Incivility: Scale Development and its Relationship with Employee's Learning Attitude.

Professor James Jian-Min Sun, Renmin University, Beijing China

Interest in workplace incivility has grown rapidly in the last decade in Western countries. As a low intensity but widespread negative behavior, both theoretical and empirical evidences have shown that workplace incivility has an impact on employee's attitude and behavior. Unfortunately, this important organizational phenomenon has not been empirically studied in China. This paper reported two studies aimed at the measurement of workplace incivility and its relationship with work attitude in Chinese organizations.

We collected workplace incivility phenomena by in-depth interview with 25 human resource professionals and employees from manufacturing and service industries. Combined with the items from western developed scales, a questionnaire with 40 items was constructed. Four factors were found from exploratory factor analysis with 250 respondents and the factors were named as work-related incivility (Cronbach α =.835), supervisor/leader incivility (α =.724), environmental incivility(α =.716), and interpersonal incivility(α =.696), respectively. The scale has 18 items and Cronbach α is .846. Convergent validity with Contina's WIS (2001) was also conducted.

We investigated employee's perception of workplace incivility and its relationship with employee's learning attitude. A questionnaire including the scale and demographic information was distributed to 500 employees in four companies. 289 valid questionnaires were used for ANOVA and correlation analysis. Results demonstrated that there is no significant difference in the perception of workplace incivility among gender, education level, marriage status. Respondents aged under 25 perceive more interpersonal incivility than other age groups. Respondents from private companies perceive more work-related incivility and supervisor/leader incivility than those from state-owned companies. Respondents with managerial duties perceive more interpersonal incivility than other duty holders. Workplace incivility is highly correlated with turnover intention (.267, $p < .01$). We compared our findings, including the meaning and structure of workplace incivility with those from Western literature and the differences were explained from a cross-cultural perspective. The relationships between workplace incivility and learning attitude of employees are analyzed. We find that three among four of the dimensions of workplace incivility (except environmental incivility) are negatively correlated with employee's learning attitude. Implications and limitations of the study as well as future research directions are discussed.

A2: Supporting Connectivity in Cross-border Vocational Education: the Case of Business Internship Advisors.

Professor Annette Ostendorf, Innsbruck University, School of Management, Austria

In all existing vocational educational systems the kind of combination of practice-related and academic knowledge is a key issue for the development of vocational competencies. Knowledge is hereby interpreted in a wider sense including not only cognitive but also social dimensions.

The modus of combination is quite different in various vocational education systems. One eminent characteristic is that all are bound to some form of crossing borders in terms of e. g. changing location, communicative styles, social contexts or communities of practice. However, there are some hidden assumptions included in all models of cross-border-learning situations which make us believe (!) that connectivity takes place - either supported by teachers and guides or solely in the learners' minds. In reality we don't really know much about the determinants fostering or hindering connectivity. Hence, one hypothesis could be that persons supporting students in cross-border learning arrangements are very important protagonist of connectivity.

Concerning supporting connectivity - in our didactic view called 'bridging' - the roles, perspectives and attitudes particularly of informal workplace guides are investigated very poorly. This is the case both in the dual vocational context and the vocational full-time schools with other forms of offering practical experiences for pupils like compulsory business internships. Whereas for the dual vocational education there are some regulations by law particularly for the in-company part of education encompassing some quality criteria and supervision by the chambers (as in Germany or Austria) business internships are not regulated at all.

In autumn 2011 a quantitative inquiry was conducted with 150 informal internship advisors offering services to a higher vocational school in Germany. They were questioned about their role, tasks, perspectives, qualifications and attitudes. The target group of informal internship advisors was selected for two reasons: firstly, they are the 'real' pillars of guidance, they do all the work with the interns and secondly there is no empirical evidence on their actions. The paper shows some central results of this piece of research.

A3: From Rational Choice to Biographical Negotiation: Challenging Dominant Policy Paradigms through Interdisciplinary LLAKESⁱ Research.

Professor Karen Evans, Institute of Education, University of London, UK

Despite the expansion of post-school education and incentives to participate in lifelong learning, institutions and labour markets continue to interlock to shape life chances according to starting social position and family/private resources to greater or lesser degrees. There is evidence of growing diversification of the pathways, but the underlying trends are towards greater rather than less polarisation between the advantaged and disadvantaged in many societies. Lifelong learning, in these contexts, will not fundamentally redefine life chances for the majority of those who participate in it, but to what extent can it be shown, in terms of evidence that policy-makers are likely to accept, to have the potential to reshape life chances during the adult life course? The dominant view that the economic and social returns to public investment in adult learning are too low to warrant large scale public funding has been challenged by recent LLAKES research. This shows significant returns for movers over stayers in the UK labour market, in their employability and employment prospects. It is argued that, under conditions of growing social polarization and economic uncertainty, lifelong learning can have a significant protective effect by keeping adults close to a changing labour market. Furthermore, LLAKES research demonstrates that research findings from different disciplinary and epistemological traditions show greater consistency when the dynamics of the life course, as well as variations between sub-groups, are taken more fully into account. Transitions and turning-points in youth and in adult life are markers of diversification of the life course. They involve biographical

negotiation, in which any decision is consequential upon previous decisions and involves the exercise of contextualised preferences as well as the calculations of 'rational choice'. A 'pluralist' framework for understanding the processes and consequences of learning through the life course is proposed for future policy-making. This is argued to be more suited than linear, rational-choice dominated models to the analysis of divergent patterns of life chances and to realistic assessments of individuals' prospects for life chances to be reshaped through learning in adult life.

ⁱ LLAKES is the ESRC Research Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies led by the Institute of Education, University of London working in partnership with the University of Southampton and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, NIESR.