

Crossing Disciplines for Collaborative Research

by Robert Briggs, G.J. de Vreede, Roni Reiter-Palmon, and Lynn Harland

What can be done to reduce the dropout rate among urban school children? How can thousands of managers in a multinational corporation conduct risk and control analyses? How can a company achieve consensus among stakeholders? These are just a few of the questions addressed by researchers at the Institute for Collaboration Science (ICS) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO).

ICS was formed in 2006 to study the effects of individual, group, organizational, and societal factors on how well people work together to achieve common goals. Bringing together faculty and students from UNO's College of Business Administration and five other colleges on campus, ICS has three missions: collaborative research, collaborative education, and community outreach.

A recent ICS project demonstrates the impact that collaboration science research can have in improving a company's operations. ICS researchers worked with an international organization that coordinates responses to global humanitarian and political crises to increase its flexibility and instill a stronger culture of collaboration among the staff.

Testing a Theory

ICS assembled a project team that included members with backgrounds in collaboration science, management, industrial and organizational psychology, information systems, and

knowledge management. Together, team members developed a new theory—the Value Frequency Model for Change of Practice—that could predict how well new collaborative work practices would be accepted and sustained once opportunities to improve collaboration within an organization were identified.

Under this new theory, team members conducted interviews with individuals throughout the company and identified 12 high-value tasks most likely to benefit from improved collaboration. Because crisis prevention planning was an area most important to the organization, the team decided that it was the best place to start putting new collaborative techniques to the test.

The ICS team then worked with stakeholders to develop and deploy new collaborative work procedures, as well as define responsibilities, channels of communication, deliverables, and measures of merit. Before the organization began working with ICS, its crisis prevention program moved so slowly that conditions could change more quickly than plans could be developed and approved. With new procedures in place, the organization's leaders report that they now can complete a task in less than one quarter of the time it used to require.

In addition, the team discovered



that the organization already had a number of computer-based collaboration tools that were being underutilized, while other needs could be filled with tools available on the market. ICS experts devised a new approach to collaboration software and have already acquired a research grant to develop prototypes.

Linking Theory to Results

To further test the Value Frequency Model for Change of Practice, ICS assigned student teams to use the protocol in community outreach projects, for which they designed collaboration-based solutions for five companies. For example, one team worked for a financial services company. Within the company, lawyers, accountants, financial planners, brokers, and other professionals needed to work together to create comprehensive financial plans for clients, but they did not work well as teams. The students introduced them to simple collaboration techniques and helped the company develop software technology to support their work. When the proj-

ect ended, the company provided a full graduate assistantship to one of the students to continue the work and hired him when he completed his MBA program.

Of the five companies, four adopted the students' suggested solutions successfully, a better success rate than expected. As a result, instructors in our new Principles of Collaboration course incorporated the protocol into the curriculum, where it is now used to support community service-based learning projects.

Benefits of Collaboration

In the two years since its founding, ICS has acquired \$3.4 million in research grants and formed an international working group to develop practical solutions for collaboration problems in real-world workplaces. ICS faculty find that cross-disciplinary collaboration gives rise to unanticipated breakthroughs, both theoretical and applied.

Business problems have become so complex that a single individual—or discipline—rarely has the expertise or resources to solve them alone. Collaboration science is a critical new area of research that helps organizations find and implement solutions more quickly. Think tanks like the ICS give faculty opportunities to experiment, while exploring and defining the next generation of collaboration technologies.

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Research from Duke professors Jack Soll (left) and Rick Larric, shown here sitting in Soll's hybrid Toyota Camry, suggests there may be a better way to post a car's fuel efficiency than in miles per gallon.

GPM Better Than MPG?

What would help car buyers make more fuel-efficient, environmentally friendly purchases? For a start, posting a vehicle's fuel efficiency in "gallons per mile" rather than "miles per gallon," say Richard Larrick and Jack Soll, professors of management at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business in Durham, N.C.

Larrick and Soll ran experiments that presented people with a series of car choices in which fuel efficiency was defined in miles per gallon. The researchers found that many people cannot easily identify which option would result in the greatest fuel efficiency. For example, most people believe that an improvement from 34 mpg to 50 mpg would save more gas over 10,000 miles than an improvement from 18 to 28 mpg. In reality,

the opposite is true: Going from 34 mpg to 50 mpg saves 94 gallons over 10,000 miles, while going from 18 mpg to 28 mpg saves 198 gallons.

However, when presented with fuel efficiency in gallons used per 100 miles, consumers are better able to gauge their savings. For example, 18 mpg becomes "5.5 gallons per 100 miles," while 28 mpg becomes "3.6 gallons per 100 miles."

Few people realize that "improving fuel efficiency from 10 to 20 mpg is actually a more significant savings than improving from 25 to 50 mpg," Larrick says.

The authors recommend that consumer publications and car manufacturers list efficiency in terms of gallons per 10,000 miles driven—already the standard in many countries. The study appeared in the June 20 issue of *Science* magazine.

More MBAs Leave Work to Become Moms

A woman with an MBA is more likely than a woman with an MD or JD to leave the workforce to become a stay-at-home mom, according to research by Catherine Wolfram, associate professor at the Haas School of Business at the University of California in Berkeley, and Jane Leber Herr, a doctoral candidate in the school's department of economics. For their study, "Opt-Out Patterns Across Careers: Labor Force Participation Rates Among Highly Educated Mothers," Wolfram and Herr examined Harvard College reunion surveys for nearly 1,000 undergraduates from the 1988 to 1991 graduating classes.

The researchers looked specifically at graduates who were women, married, and had at least one child. The researchers found that, 15 years after graduating from Harvard College, 28 percent of the women surveyed who went on to get MBAs were stay-at-home moms. By comparison,

only 6 percent of women who went on to become doctors stopped working outside the home.

Wolfram and Herr also found that 79 percent of the Harvard College women in the survey who went on to earn JDs continued working after having children. However, JDs with children were more likely to switch careers—MBA moms were twice as

likely to quit working altogether.

Wolfram hypothesizes that work environment plays a key role in determining career longevity. Doctors, for example, often work in private practices and may be able to work part-time more easily than women in other fields. Businesswomen, on the other hand, more commonly must work long hours and travel frequently. "Women who are in family-friendly environments are more likely to stay working," says Wolfram.

Wolfram believes that if businesses were to become more flexible and adopt more family-friendly policies, businesswomen would be more likely to continue working after having children. The message to women, says Wolfram, "is to be cognizant of the environment your degree gets you into and what opportunities it offers."

Want to Attract Gen Y? Be Green

Companies with "green" practices may have the best shot at attracting young "Generation Y" consumers, according to a study by the Center for Marketing Technology (CMT) at Bentley College in Waltham, Massachusetts. The catch: Perception may mean more than reality when it comes to winning over young customers.

Pierre Berthon, marketing professor, and Ian Cross, CMT director, surveyed 2,127 college students across the United States, whose average age was just under 22 years old. The goal was to discover which brands these students believed were the most and least environmentally friendly, and why.

Toyota and Honda topped the list of the environmentally friendly—students cited their manufacture of

fuel-efficient cars as the reason for the high marks. Whole Foods came in third for its emphasis on organic foods. Companies that students noted were the least green were Exxon Mobil, Hummer, and Ford.

Ironically, General Electric came in fourth place on the "most green" list and eleventh on the "least green" list. Students lauded GE for its work in alternative and renewable energy, but criticized it for its contribution to pollution. In addition, Gen Y perceives Nike as being less green than Google, when available data on the environment and social action show that Nike is by far the more environmentally friendly company.

Berthon and Cross describe companies like Nike as "Green Martyrs"—those that adopt green practices but get no credit for it in the marketplace. Xerox is another company that is touted for its ethical business practices but fails to communicate its efforts to consumers, the researchers note. Such dichotomous results suggest that companies will have to work to manage their green reputations.

The Gen Y students surveyed indicated that a company's stand on environmental, social, and ethical issues was "important" or "somewhat important" in their purchasing decisions. To win this generation over, the researchers argue, "reputation management" is key. Companies



Catherine Wolfram



Jane Leber Herr



Pierre Berthon



Ian Cross

need to make certain that their efforts to adopt socially responsible practices are perceived as part of their brand and recognized in the public eye.

“Specificity pays dividends,” says Berthon. “Our advice to any company would be to have a flagship product or service that embodies the best of its green actions.”

Death Makes Us Hungry

When people think about their own deaths, they eat more, say Dirk Smeesters of the Rotterdam School of Management at Erasmus University in The Netherlands and Naomi Mandel of Arizona State University in Tempe. The associate marketing professors find that “consumers, especially those with a lower self-esteem, might



be more susceptible to overconsumption when faced with images of death during the news or their favorite crime-scene investigation shows.”

Smeesters and Mandel conducted experiments in Europe and the U.S. on 746 subjects. Participants were evaluated to determine their levels of self-esteem. Then, those in the study group were asked to write about their own deaths, while those in the control group were asked to write about a visit to the dentist. Researchers gave each group a supply of cookies to munch on while they pondered these topics.

Smeesters and Mandel found that participants who wrote about their own deaths, and who exhibited low self-esteem, ate more

cookies and listed more items on a hypothetical shopping list than those who simply wrote about a trip to the dentist.

A theory called “escape from self-awareness” may explain the behavior, the researchers say. When reminded of their own mortality, people may begin to wonder about the meaning of their own lives.

Some, especially those with low self-esteem, may escape such thoughts through overeating or similar activities such as overspending.

The study, “The Sweet Escape: Effects of Mortality Salience on Consumption Quantities for High- and Low-Self-Esteem Consumers,” was published in the August 2008 issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

UPCOMING & ONGOING

THE “HOT MOMMAS PROJECT”

Kathy Korman Frey, adjunct professor of management at the George Washington University School of Business in Washington, D.C., has developed the “Hot Mommas Project,” which presents the best practices of successful businesswomen. Her research will be the basis of a large database of case studies related to women in business. The completed research will be published in a book, *How to be a Hot Momma: The Rule Book for Doing It All*, which is scheduled to be released in 2009.



vately held life science and technology companies. The one-year project, which began in June, will offer SDSU faculty resources to develop teaching modules and mini-case studies.

GRANT TO STUDY STARTUPS

The National Opinion Research Center has awarded

a \$25,000 grant to Franz Lohrke, marketing and management department chair and entrepreneurship programs coordinator at Samford University’s Brock School of Business in Birmingham, Alabama, and Barbara Bird, associate professor of management at American University’s Kogod School of Business in Washington, D.C. The researchers will use the grant to fund two studies. One will measure the legitimacy of startup firms; the other will explore both why some startups form strategic alliances with other firms and how well these alliances succeed over time.

\$100K FOR OWNERSHIP RESEARCH

San Diego State University’s College of Business Administration in California has received a \$100,000 gift from the Foundation for Enterprise Development. The donation will support a research project on organizational inclusiveness and equity distribution practices and their impact on San Diego’s pri-

RESEARCH RECOGNITIONS

■ Marketing professors **Michael Levy** of Babson College in Wellesley, Massachusetts, **Arun Sharma** of the University of Miami in Florida, and **Heiner Evanschitzky** of the University of Strathclyde in the United Kingdom have been awarded the 2007 James M. Comer Award for Best Contribution to Selling and Sales Management Theory/Methodology in the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*. Their winning article was “The Variance in Sales Performance Explained by the Knowledge Structures of Salespeople.”

■ **Bill Fischer**, a professor at IMD in Lausanne, Switzerland, and **Rebecca Chung**,

a research associate at IMD, won the second “Imagination Lab Foundation Award for Innovative Scholarship.” The award is granted by the Imagination Lab Foundation in collaboration with the European Academy of Management. Fischer and Chung were honored for their design of executive development materials that focus on managing in emerging economies.

■ An article co-authored by **Roger Schmenner**, professor of operations management at the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University in Bloomington, and **Robert Collins**, professor emeritus of manufacturing management and strategy at IMD in Lausanne, Switzerland, has been

selected as Outstanding Paper by the Emerald Literati Network Awards for Excellence. The article, “Understanding Persistently Variable Performance in Plants,” was published in the *International Journal of Operations & Production* in 2007.

■ **John Hull**, the Maple Financial Group Professor of Derivatives and Risk Management at the University of Toronto’s Rotman School of Management in Canada, is the inaugural honoree in the History Makers Series of the Professional Risk Managers International Association. Hull was recognized for his research involving risk, stock options, volatility surfaces, and interest rate derivatives.

STUDY BRIEFS

■ FINANCE FIGHTS FOR FUNDING

Researchers from the University of Missouri-Kansas City find that finance research attracts less external funding than research in other disciplines. Finance professors David Kuipers and Stephen Pruitt examined articles published in the four top finance journals from 1999 to 2004 and found that external funding is rare, especially in the U.S. Close to 20 percent of authors received external funding for their work, much less than funding received by researchers in the humanities, natural and social sciences, and the practical arts. Their paper, “The External Funding of Academic Finance Research,” is forthcoming in *The Finance Review*.



■ KEEP CONTROL IN CHINA

A study by Joseph Johnson, assistant professor of marketing at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida, and Gerard Tellis, professor of marketing at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, finds that joint ventures may not work well when it comes to entering the markets in China and India. The researchers studied data related to 192 companies that entered China and India just as these markets experienced deregulation. They found that smaller companies that retained control of their operations did better overall than those who came in as part of joint ventures. Their paper, “Drivers of Success for Market Entry into China and India,” was published in the June issue of the *Journal of Marketing*.

■ MOBILE IS GLOBAL

Mobile communications technology is used most often in emerging markets, according to a study released by the Altimo Foundation, a London nonprofit that promotes social investment in emerging markets. Citizens of Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (the former Soviet Union) account for 60 percent of mobile technology use. Researchers note that as emerging markets continue to dominate the global mobile market, the power shift between traditional markets and new economies may encourage business investment in developing regions. The study, “The Value of the World’s Mobile Industry, 2008–2013,” was conducted by scholars at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the U.S.; Cass Business School in London; and the New Economics School in Moscow. ■



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