New faces of research (continued)

Seeing stars: factors for extraordinary career success

Dr. Rick Cotton joined the Gustavson School of Business in July 2014 from the University of North Carolina. His primary research focuses on how human capital and social capital interact to foster career and organizational success. There are three aspects to Dr. Cotton’s research: extraneous career achievement, mentoring/developmental networks; and how individuals in challenging situations survive and thrive.

To further his research on extraordinary career achievement, Dr. Cotton is collecting data on more than 25,000 inductees from over 240 professional, sports and occupational Halls of Fame. They hail from many fields, including professional sports, music, and business. Dr. Cotton’s goal is to better understand which personal and organizational factors foster extraordinary career achievement, how individual achievement translates to organizational success, and how extraordinary individuals and organizations contribute to economic development and the formation of industry clusters.

Dr. Cotton’s research on mentoring/developmental networks has been his primary research area thus far. In this area, he has studied the networks of extraordinary career achievers in baseball, football, teaching, business, consumer electronics and automotive industries in addition to how institutional logics shape development networks and how relationship expectations affect support received.

Dr. Cotton has won Academy of Management (AOM) Careers Division awards for Best Student Paper (2010) and Best Overall Paper (2012). With Dr. Kathy Kram and Gustavson’s Dr. Yan Shen, Dr. Cotton received the Careers Division Reed Centre Best Applied Paper Award at the 2014 AOM meeting in Philadelphia, PA for their paper “Advancing the Study of Developmental Networks to Include Developer Types and Person-Network Fit.” This recent work, which has resulted in an article in the Spring 2015 issue of MIT Sloan Management Review, builds on their dissertations and joint paper in the Academy of Management Journal, “On Becoming Extraordinary: The Content and Structure of the Developmental Networks of Major League Baseball Hall of Famers” where they explored the structure and content of 62 induction speeches to identify the roles of those who supported the inductees and which support mattered most to career achievement.

Dr. Cotton states he was “fascinated to see the variety of relationships they acknowledged and the kinds of support they cited.” In such a competitive field as Major League Baseball, one may have expected technical advice and guidance from coaches and managers to trump social and psychological support. Instead, the results identified more emphasis on friendship, emotional support, and inspiration.

The research has important implications for organizations and individuals in how career development and mentoring is perceived and delivered. Organizations could benefit from fostering a shift to developmental networks to enable success. Similarly, individuals could use a more strategic approach in their own career support systems by drawing on a range of skills and experience from a diverse pool of advisors inside and outside of work in order to foster their desired success outcomes.

Pipeline Palooza IV
See you at the intersection!

The Gustavson School of Business held its fourth annual internal research conference, Pipeline Palooza, on February 20, 2015. Unlike traditional research conferences that focus largely on full papers in the latter half of the research pipeline, Pipeline Palooza was created to celebrate and support research activities at all stages of the research process—from initial idea to post-publication impact.

This year’s event was preceded by an engaging lecture by Dr. Tima Bansal, professor and Canada Research Chair in business sustainability at Ivey Business School, Western University. Her public talk, Hooked on Speed: How the addiction to change is duping corporations and eroding sustainability, was well received and generated much discussion.

Pipeline Palooza IV’s theme explored Gustavson’s Sustainability/Social Responsibility pillar in the context of our mission “To pioneer business education that creates sustainable value.”

Attendees included many Gustavson faculty, PhD students, visiting scholars and interested staff members. Dean Saul Klein kicked off the day welcoming the panelists and attendees, and stressed the importance of research: “To enact the vision of the University of North Carolina. His primary research focuses on how human capital and social capital interact to foster career and organizational success. There are three aspects to Dr. Cotton’s research: extraneous career achievement, mentoring/developmental networks; and how individuals in challenging situations survive and thrive.

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