UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ASPIRATIONS, AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF POSTGRADUATE STUDY OPTIONS: A PRELIMINARY, QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

Melinda M. Varhegyi
University of Technology, Sydney

Denise M. Jepsen
University of Technology, Sydney

Acknowledgement

Abstract

Little attention has been directed to the attitudes of undergraduate university students towards postgraduate studies and little is known about the extent of undergraduates' awareness of postgraduate degrees. Research in the careers arena has revealed inconsistencies in factors that impact on a student's decision to pursue postgraduate study. Using focus groups across different levels of Bachelor of Business students, this study examines the attitudes of university undergraduate students towards postgraduate study. Factors that impact on an undergraduate decision to pursue postgraduate study are also explored. Results suggest relatively little is known about postgraduate study by first year students.

Qualitative data revealed a number of misconceptions, suggesting universities are not effective in communicating postgraduate information to students. Students require more timely, specific and appropriate information about entry requirements, costs, financing options and duration of postgraduate degrees. Recommendations related to the timing, the context and the nature of the person who presents the postgraduate study options information are made.

Decisions made by undergraduate students can be grouped into three time points. The first is prior to entering university, the second is during the undergraduate years and the third time point at which undergraduate students make major decisions is at the completion of their undergraduate degree. Each decision-making point is represented by bodies of literature that explore the specific decisions encountered by students. At the first point, a wealth of research has explored how students decide whether they should attend university (Hemachandra & Kodithuwakku, 2007; Stage & Hossler, 1989; Wilson, 1997) and how students decide which college to attend (Holland, 1958; Kim, 2004; Kolhede & Amer Mkt, 1994).

The second period, the undergraduate years, that is the time in which the student is completing their bachelor degree, is similarly marked by a large body of research. A number of decisions are made and shaped during the undergraduate years. One decision made during the undergraduate years that has received significant research attention is the choice of major. For instance, Eide and Waehrer (1998) investigated the impact of expected returns in the form of expected earnings after graduation, and the expectations of attendance in a graduate program on choice of major. Other research looking at how students decide on majors on has examined the relative earning associated with different undergraduate majors (Altonji, 1993; Berger, 1988; Grogger & Eide, 1995) and major choice differences according to gender (Polachek, 1978). Similarly, subject choice has been highly researched (Callender & Jackson, 2008; Van de Werfhorst, Sullivan, & Cheung, 2003).

Another aspect of undergraduate decision-making that has received less research attention is postgraduate aspirations of undergraduate students. Inconsistent results have been found about factors that influence student's postgraduate decision-making. Some factors found to be influential are intrapersonal characteristics such as age (Hearn, 1987) gender (Farmer, Wardrop, Anderson, & Risinger, 1995), race (Liu, 1998), class year (Long, Sowa, & Niles, 1995), levels of self-efficacy (Gianakos, 2001), and approaches to career-decision-making (Niles, Erford, Hunt, & Watts, 1997). External factors found to influence postgraduate decision-making include institutional types, personal interactions with family (Hearn, 1987) and others or mentors (Packard, 2003).

Research on undergraduate aspirations has been limited to postgraduate aspirations of specific populations, such as women (Brown, 2004), dental students (Scarbecz & Ross, 2007), Greek working women (Vryonides & Vitsilakis, 2008) and American and Chinese college students (Ling-Yi, 2006). Other studies have examined student decision-making related to specific career choices such as information technology (Lang, 2007), mathematics students (Davis et al., 2008) and medical students (Reed, Jernstedt, & Reber, 2001). One study has examined the postgraduate study aspirations of a diverse student population - of 418 students across two universities. Hearn (1987) examined the impact of undergraduate experiences on aspirations and plans for graduate and professional education using variables including grade point average, education aspirations, faculty and parental support, academic involvement, achievement and satisfaction.

The third time point, the milestone of graduation from the undergraduate degree, is also associated with a large body of research. Students make a range of decisions at graduation. Montgomery (2002), for example, provides an account of the factors which influence a students decision when selecting an MBA program. Institutional ranking, starting salary, current employment status, work experience, expected employer financial assistance, children and scores from the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) play important roles in that decision.

To help account for decisions students make after graduating from an undergraduate degree, a number of decision-making models have been developed. For instance, Ehrenberg (1992) proposed an economic choice model for the decision to undertake and complete a doctoral study by focusing on economic variables influencing this type of decision. The decision to undertake and complete doctoral study is a special case of the theory of occupational choice. According to occupational choice theory, individuals are assumed to evaluate the expected benefits and costs that will result over their lifetimes if they choose various options and then to choose the option that maximises their expected well being (Ehrenberg, 1992). Benefits include higher earning and better working conditions while costs include lower tuition, more generous policies, higher completion rates and shorter time-to-complete. A combination of higher benefits and lower costs will encourage more people to undertake and complete doctoral study in a field.

The majority of research on the study aspirations of undergraduate students is post hoc, drawing on the aspirations of students who have completed their undergraduate degree and are either thinking about or already engaged in postgraduate study. As a result, little is written about the antecedents to the decision to become a postgraduate student. Yet undergraduate decision-making influences and processes are of crucial interest to program coordinators, deans and department heads. Undergraduate and postgraduate recruitment is a significant activity for all universities. Little is known about how effective information dissemination about postgraduate degrees is in raising the awareness and aspirations of undergraduate students to pursue postgraduate study.

Awareness of postgraduate degrees is considered a precursor to aspirations. That is, awareness of postgraduate degrees is required in order for a student to be able to contemplate pursuing postgraduate study. Awareness is achieved through communication about postgraduate degrees by the university to relevant students. But how much do students actually know about postgraduate

degrees? What would undergraduate students like to know about postgraduate degrees, and when would that information be most helpful? A student's awareness of postgraduate course availability must be a significant influence on the decision to proceed to postgraduate study. Yet awareness of postgraduate degrees by undergraduate students has yet to be examined.

The decision-making process is complex and subject to multiple influences, which is particularly true for major life decisions such as contemplating postgraduate study. There is an absence of research regarding the attitudes of university students towards postgraduate study. University life and related processes are new to first year students, many of whom have not determined their major, let alone contemplated study after their bachelor degree. No studies have addressed postgraduate awareness or aspirations amongst undergraduate students in Australia and as a result little is known about undergraduates' awareness of postgraduate study and the factors that influence postgraduate study decisions. This study attempts to bridge that gap by examining the attitudes of Australian undergraduate business students and to further understand the factors impacting on undergraduate students' decisions to pursue postgraduate study.

The study uses focus groups to gauge the students' awareness and intentions towards postgraduate study to supplement the literature on what is known of student aspirations and decision-making and to create a deeper understanding of the research issues. Focus groups are in-depth group interviews employing relatively homogenous groups to provide specific research topic information (Hughes & Dumont, 1993) and are popular largely due to the time and cost efficiency relative to individual interviews (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). Focus groups facilitate the interaction of participants without excessive control from the researcher and can produce novel of unexpected insights which may not be generated via any other methodology (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). Focus groups provide researchers with direct access to the language and concepts participants use to structure their experiences and to think and talk about a designated topic. In their reliance on social interaction,

focus groups can also help researchers identify cultural knowledge that is shared among group members as well as to appreciate the range of different experiences individuals within a group may have (Hughes & Dumont, 1993). Unlike quantitative methods, focus groups emphasize participants' perspectives and allow the researcher to explore the nuances and complexities of participants' attitudes and experiences. Focus groups have unique strengths over other qualitative methods (Morgan, 1988; Morgan & Spanish, 1984)

Method

Participants were local and international undergraduate Bachelor of Business students in an inner city Australian university offering postgraduate options including honours, masters and PhD. To recruit participants, a verbal direct appeal was made by the researcher visiting first, second and third year lectures. Students were given the opportunity to sign up for the focus groups after the lecture. A $20 thank you was offered for participation. While focus groups may be composed of strangers (Basch, 1987; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), selection in this study was based on suitability and availability.

Conduct of the focus groups was based on procedures proposed by Morgan, Krueger and King (1998). The chief investigator moderated the focus groups, while a transcriber took notes and made observations. A backup recording of each session was made. After informed consent was obtained, the moderator described the project and asked the first of a set of prepared research questions. The transcriber documented participants' comments, enabling real-time clarification. Focus group members were encouraged to talk amongst themselves when discussing the research questions. The moderator inserted new questions when required and kept the discussion on the research topic. A debriefing was conducted after each focus group and any misconceptions regarding postgraduate studies raised by students were addressed. Consistent with Basch (1987) and Morgan (1988) who recommend a minimum of two focus groups for each population subset being studied, there were 12 females and 8 males who participated in the four one hour focus

groups. Mean age was 20 years. A total of six participants were from double degrees.

Results

Duration of postgraduate degree: Respondents in three focus groups estimated a duration of one year for honours, with some respondents in focus group four (FG4) saying that honours is one additional semester. Similarly, most respondents suggested one to two years duration for a masters degree, with a few FG4 respondents saying that duration depends on the type of masters. The duration estimated by focus groups for a PhD varied. An FG2 respondent suggested two to three years, whereas FG3 respondents were unable to provide an estimate. FG4 respondents said PhD duration may range from one and a half to five years. Some FG4 respondents said students can choose to do a "shorter or longer" PhD, with one respondent suggesting there is no time limit. Similarly, FG1 respondents suggested the PhD duration is infinite and depends on how long the student requires to complete.

Content of postgraduate degree: FG 1 respondents said that in honours, students complete a major work or thesis whereas in a PhD students "study a specific example". One respondent suggested that PhD students need to complete a certain number of teaching or tutoring hours. FG2 respondents said research is involved in all postgraduate degrees. Some FG3 respondents suggested students get to choose what they research or study, whereas others disagreed and said that students are still required to attend classes in addition to completing a thesis. In relation to a PhD, FG3 respondents suggest that students are required to research, with one respondent suggesting that PhD students spend time with a "mentor type person", but do not attend classes. FG4 respondents suggest that for honours, masters and PhD degrees, students take normal subjects and submit a thesis. Two respondents said postgraduate students are required to defend their thesis before a panel of experts.

Postgraduate course admission: Some FG1 respondents said postgraduate students are selected, others said a credit average is required, while the remainder said some degrees require a high distinction average. FG2 respondents said honours and masters entry is granted to students with a distinction average but that a high distinction average is required for entry into PhD. FG3 respondents said students need to perform "well" in their undergraduate degree achieving "at least a distinction average", with others said a credit average is sufficient. All students agreed that a pass average was not sufficient for entry. One respondent said that honours was simply given to a student who was performing exceptionally well at the undergraduate level. In relation to course admission for a masters degree, some FG3 respondents said entry is granted based on work experience, depending on the type of masters. In relation to a PhD, FG3 respondents were not sure whether a masters degree was a prerequisite. One respondent said admission into a PhD program is based on an application that is reviewed.

Benefits of postgraduate degree: Respondents in all focus groups identified the link between a higher qualification and an increase in workforce competitiveness. FG1 respondents said that postgraduate degrees result in higher paid positions and "more letters after your name". Some FG2 respondents said postgraduate degrees "look nice on your resume". One FG3 respondent said being able "to do something you are interested" is a benefit. FG4 respondents identified a PhD benefit is that it permits entry into academia to teach at university.

Cost of postgraduate degree: Most respondents agreed that "postgraduate degrees are very expensive". In relation to honours, FG2 respondent's estimated an honours degree to cost between $15,000 and $20,000. FG3 respondent's estimated honours to cost $10,000. FG1 and FG4 respondents could not estimate the costs of honours. With regards to masters, FG2 estimated the same costs as honours, while FG3 respondents said a masters would cost $20,000. FG4 respondents were unclear about the costs of masters, however, one respondent estimated the costs of a postgraduate degree to be

"tens of thousands, upwards of $30,000". For the costs of a PhD, FG2 respondents estimated $20,000. FG3 respondents estimated "somewhere in the middle of $10,000 and $20,000". A few FG3 respondents said a PhD would cost "less than masters" because "more independent work is involved" and "PhD students do not need to attend classes and lectures". In contrast, FG4 respondents were unsure about PhD costs, "particularly if there is a stipend involved". Without a stipend, students suggest that "PhD students are required to pay some costs". Some FG4 respondents said that perhaps the PhD is not as expensive as the masters because students can work half time. When probed as to whether government-supported positions were provided for postgraduate degrees so that students are not required to pay until they are employed full-time, all respondents expressed uncertainty. Respondents from FG1 said that because the government-supported HECS funding is available for undergraduate degrees it is also available for postgraduate degrees. All but one respondent said all universities have HECs for postgraduate degrees. FG3 respondents were unsure as to whether HECs was available for postgraduate degrees, some saying HECS is available for honours but not masters degree or a PhD.

Timing and location of postgraduate study: When respondents were asked where and when students should do postgraduate study, FG1 and FG3 respondents said students enter honours immediately after completion of an undergraduate degree. In contrast, FG2 and FG4 respondents said it would be better to get work experience before entering honours, but were unsure if this was an option supported by the university. FG4 respondents said completing a "a string of degrees straight after each other" is "not a good idea", although "it depends on the individual". Some respondents said it is harder to have a break from study and return to study later on. Some respondents said it is a good idea to try and find a sponsor organisation to complete postgraduate studies. FG1 and FG3 respondents said it is better to return to masters and PhD degrees after work experience. Similarly, one FG4 respondent said it is better to work before completing a masters or a PhD because you can see "exactly why you require a higher degree, rather than why

academia tells you to get one" and "if you do a PhD without having worked then you will have difficulty in your first job".

Factors influencing postgraduate study: Respondents across all focus groups admitted the costs associated with postgraduate degrees would influence their decision. Siblings generally were identified as influencers by some FG1 and FG4 respondents, particularly if the sibling has completed a postgraduate degree as suggested by FG3 respondents. Some FG4 respondents said parents are an influence, with some FG2 respondents agreeing, whereas other respondents said that while their parents do influence them, the respondents still do what they want to do. One FG4 respondent said his parents do not influence him because he knows what his path is. Colleagues and employers were also identified as a source of influence, with some FG3 respondents saying they would enter postgraduate study if their job required further study. One FG3 respondent said that employers in industry are influential because academics are biased and want students to continue. One FG4 respondent said work colleagues could be influential, particularly if they were studying something interesting. Friends were mentioned as an influencing factor by two of the four focus groups. FG1 respondents said their grades would influence their decision, as grades may represent how well they could cope with more intensive study. Other FG1 respondents said that self motivation would be an influencing factor. The university itself was an influencing factor, whether that is lecturers recommending postgraduate courses or encouragement from the university. If "you liked your uni experience" you may be influenced to pursue postgraduate study. Some FG3 respondents identified lecturers and tutors as a source of influence. FG1 respondents said the benefits of postgraduate courses would be of influence. One FG2 respondent said the location of the university and the travel time would influence whether he would complete a postgraduate degree. Another FG2 respondent said the factors that influence you before you begin an undergraduate degree may be different factors compared to those that may influence you in deciding to do a PhD.

Intentions to progress to postgraduate: When asked about their expectations to enter postgraduate study, FG1 respondents said that his students colleagues "do not really talk about" their postgraduate study expectations and that the word postgraduate never arises in conversation. One respondent said the prospect of "doing more uni is too much, some students do not even know their majors". One respondent said they imagine the work load of a PhD to be "crazy". It was said that "all the postgraduate students are in their rooms so it must be a lot of work". FG2 respondents highlighted a different perspective. The double major students said that double degree students have a long time to think about whether they want to do postgraduate study. One FG3 respondent said that she is open to the idea of doing honours because her sister and brother have both done it. Another double degree student said "I'm doing five years of business and law and that's probably enough", but then contradicted herself saying "on the other hand if you have spent five years at uni then what is another year?" One FG4 respondent said he would like to go on to postgraduate study but he does not know how to get in to it. One student said she would do postgraduate study only if her employer required her to "go to the second level", for which she would expect to be paid "at least $20,000 more".

Information sources for postgraduate study: FG1 and FG2 respondents said the university does not promote where to find information regarding postgraduate study, with one respondent saying that "no one is trying to get students to think about it, and you have to go after it yourself". When asked where they would seek such information, FG2 and FG4 respondents said the student centre, other research students, online resources such as Google or the library. FG3 respondents also said postgraduate students would be good sources of information – one respondent would "like to understand their mindset when they went into it". Information from those in industry would be good according to one FG3 respondent. FG4 respondents said they would seek information from friends and colleagues and lecturers. When asked at what point postgraduate study information would be most useful, FG3 respondents said information would probably be most useful in 4th

or 5th year for double degree students. Some respondents said that a "general overview of what postgraduate study is" would be beneficial because "I can't imagine that most would have any idea about it". Students would generally like to know more about the benefits of postgraduate programs. FG4 respondents said information sessions with PhD and masters students would be helpful. Some FG4 respondents said information should be provided to students early on in their degree so that "students… can think about it for longer". While respondents generally expressed a desire for information, some FG1 respondents admit they do not want a "whole lot of information", so that it is "not too overwhelming".

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to uncover what undergraduate students know about postgraduate study options. The respondents in the focus groups revealed a great deal about their knowledge and lack of knowledge of postgraduate study options. The students were open in their discussions, freely admitting what they did not know and appeared keen to find out more about postgraduate study options. The cultural diversity of the groups was an advantage that stemmed from recruiting strangers into the focus groups, rather than individuals who were familiar with each other.

With regard to the duration of postgraduate degrees, many respondents replied similarly with most estimating the correct one year duration for honours compared to longer for masters and PhD. While students do not seem to know a great deal about postgraduate courses, they do appear to know the most about honours. This is possibly because honours is clearly included in the university handbook as a pathway from the undergraduate business degree. Similarly, students may know more about honours because it is seen as the more likely and achievable extension of an undergraduate degree. The duration of a PhD estimated varied, with most suggesting that the duration is infinite. This misconception seems common and may be explained by previous PhD candidatures not being time limited very strictly. In recent times the duration of a PhD has moved away from the 'infinite'

number of years to many universities requiring PhD completion within three to four years. This change is largely attributable to the Research Training Scheme (RTS) which was implemented by the Australian federal government in 2001. The RTS has significantly changed the completion requirements, time scale and funding of postgraduate students in Australia (Edwards, 2002). Funding for PhD candidature from the government to the university has been reduced to four years, and funding for masters degree has been limited to two years. Undergraduate students generally are not aware of these funding arrangements or the implications associated with changes in the RTS rules. It would seem that undergraduate students who have heard the horror stories of past students having extreme long PhD tenures use those stories as an exemplar. It is easy to see how, in the absence of correcting information, undergraduates may believe the PhD is not time limited. An implication of this is that universities need to be clear about the duration expectations of postgraduate degrees. The unlimited duration of the PhD certainly appeared to be a deterrent to the students in the focus groups. Clearly articulating the duration of postgraduate degrees such as a PhD, may improve the overall attractiveness of postgraduate degrees.

Many misconceptions about the content, entry requirements and the costs associated with postgraduate degrees were expressed. There was uncertainty about which postgraduate degrees involve research and whether students were also required to attend classes. Similarly, there was significant confusion about the entry requirements of postgraduate degrees. The speculation of the postgraduate costs was revealing. Students estimated that PhDs could cost 'a few hundred thousand' and that a PhD would be the most expensive postgraduate degree, whether or not HECS was available, given it takes longer to complete. The reality is that for local Australian students, no fees are payable for a PhD and often a scholarship or stipend is available. Clearly tertiary administrators will want to correct this misconception.

When asked about the benefits of postgraduate degrees, most comments were about workforce competitiveness. Only one

student referred to the benefit of learning more about something she was interested in. All other respondents focused on the extrinsic benefits such as increasing job prospects, helping with promotion and obtaining a higher paid position. An implication of this is that universities might wish to be more active in communicating benefits of postgraduate degrees, not just from academics but also from industry professionals. Students want to know how a postgraduate degree will help them in industry.

Students reported confusion about where to source information on postgraduate study. Those students enrolled in three year business degrees seek more information sooner than students in the five year double major degrees. While students want more information, they recognise they do not want to be bombarded with too much information that will overwhelm them early in their studies. Critical information such as postgraduate entry requirements is required by these students early in their degrees.

Although the focus groups revealed several specific findings regarding student's perceptions of postgraduate study, perhaps the most important conclusion was that students in each focus group presented a myriad of misconceptions about postgraduate study. Most questions asked by the researcher were matched by uncertain responses. Students frequently referred to anecdotal information they had heard across the years. Examples of anecdotal sources of information include "the girl on the bus was talking about a PhD", or "I know someone who did a PhD", "hearing from others who are doing it, like cousins", "my neighbour did postgraduate study". The range of information sources may account for many misconceptions about postgraduate courses. There is a lot of variation between different postgraduate degree courses and the postgraduate study experience shared by 'the girl on the bus' with a first year business student may not be applicable to a business degree. The 'girl on the bus' may be referring to her studies in, say, architecture, science, nursing or maths. Much of the confusion around postgraduate study, therefore, appears to be due to the source of anecdotal information not matching the discipline or degree to which the information is applied. Students appear to assume that what they

hear is relevant to their own degree. For students who obtain their postgraduate information from sources such as a tutor, the girl on the bus or perhaps a cousin with a medical degree, then the discipline and the degree may well be disconnected. It is not surprising that there is so much confusion and so many misconceptions about postgraduate study. There are significant implications for this finding. Universities may wish to clarify the postgraduate options that are appropriate and available to their students – by discipline group.

In terms of the factors that may influence a student's decision to pursue postgraduate study, all focus groups identified costs as a factor of influence. Given firstly that all focus groups identified costs and secondly there is confusion about the availability of HECS funding, universities wishing to increase interest in postgraduate study may wish to consider clarifying the costs associated with postgraduate degrees and the reimbursements available to lower those costs. The cost misconception is especially true for the PhD degree where all focus groups estimated very high costs although in all cases other than non-scholarship international students a PhD is free of cost. The influence of parents on postgraduate study intentions is not as prominent as initially expected. While some students did admit that their parents would love it if they did a masters or a PhD, others admitted that they will do what they want anyway: "Parents give us lots of pressure to get into uni but once you are there, the pressure drops off". Other prominent sources of influence appear to include the expected sources of siblings, colleagues and friends.

Although the study is limited by the small number of focus groups and the restriction of range to business students, there are a number of important issues that arise from this study. There are three interventions that this study indicates will assist those universities wishing to increase their undergraduate students' interest in their postgraduate study options. First, rather than waiting to see which students turn out to be the superior students, universities are likely to benefit from clearly articulating the postgraduate study options available to their students in their first,

second and third year of undergraduate study. Second, the results suggest that information about postgraduate options will be more worthwhile when conducted within a discipline-specific context rather than a non-specific setting where variations might cause confusion, for example where a masters degree may be completed in either one or two full time years in different disciplines. Third, respondents in this study repeatedly suggest that industry employer representatives and new or young academics are preferred sources of information on postgraduate study options rather than established academics.

Beyond those three recommendations, however, the study has identified four key postgraduate degree decision making influencers that students require to be articulated clearly, early and frequently throughout the undergraduate degree. Those key issues are the specific entry requirements into the different postgraduate options (for example, a credit or distinction average required for honours), the costs of the postgraduate degrees, the financing options available to different categories of students and last, the expected duration of each of the postgraduate degrees should be clarified.

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ADVANCING THE QUALITY OF HRM AND HRD IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

PREFACE

As the globalisation of markets continues at a rapid pace, the challenges for HR managers and those teaching HR increase. Human Resource Management practices vary between countries, sector, size and ownership of organizations. As a result it is important to acknowledge that what are largely considered to be 'Western' style HRM practices may not be relevant in other cultures. Despite this, some lessons may be learned from organizational experiences that can be transferred across countries and cultures through globalisation.

Globalisation is used to define a combination of factors - a single market place with growing free trade among nations; the increasing flow and sharing of information; and connections and opportunities for organisations and people to interact around the world without being constrained by national boundaries. To date globalisation has been a prime force for spreading knowledge through technology. Knowledge about production methods, management techniques, export markets, and economic policies is available at very low cost, and this knowledge represents a valuable resource for both developed and developing countries. It has been suggested that the HRD profession must include not only economic development and workplace learning, but it must also be committed to the political, social, environmental, cultural, and spiritual development of people around the world, particularly, as global success depends on utilizing the resources and diverse talents and capabilities of the broadest possible spectrum of humanity.

This conference draws from the research and experiences of participants to provide lessons and examples regarding how some organizations and individuals are attempting to utilise HRM strategies in order to promote agility and excellence and, in some cases, globalise business through such diverse topics as:

- HRD and HRM policy
- Organisational culture and power
- ER processes: collective and individual
- Community resource development
- HRM outcomes: empowerment, job satisfaction and productivity
- Workplace learning
- Values, politics, power, ethics and HRD
- Employment relations at public policy level
- HR and corporate sustainability
- Leadership and other areas.

The papers presented in these Proceedings have all been subject to peer referee by two reviewers with comments offered to authors.

The conference organisers would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the College of Management at Mahidol University for generously hosting this 17th Annual Conference of IERA. We also wish to express our thanks to the University of Technology, Sydney for its financial and administrative support of the conference. Special thanks to Virginia Furse, who worked tirelessly to produce these Proceedings and other materials critical to the success of the conference

The Conference Organisers are sure this 17th IERA Conference will be a rich and rewarding learning experience for everyone involved. We look forward to welcoming you to Bangkok.

IERA 2009 Conference Committee
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