

Lingnan University SDG Report



Research on economic growth and employment

Lingnan University continually supported cross-disciplinary studies on decent work, in which many academic colleagues have engaged in plenty of research projects focusing on work-related issues. Such endeavour echoed the policy agenda to improve the quality of work and inclusive economic growth. Between 2019 and 2023, there were more than 164 research outputs and 69 projects contributed to the SDG8. Overall, there were four main dimensions of the scholarly activities carried out in and beyond the pandemic times.

Tackling unemployment issues and rethinking unemployment protection

Against the backdrop of increasing unemployment rates, research seminars and policy forums have been held at Lingnan University in the past few years. For example, Professor Joshua Mok Ka Ho and Professor Genguha Huang conducted a study on the impact of land border shutdown on citizens' livelihood, investigating how workers' jobs and incomes were affected by the quarantine measures. Moreover, the Institute of Policy Studies and the colleagues from the Department of Sociology and Social Policy and Department of Cultural Studies, in collaboration with Oxfam Hong Kong, organised the forum on Unemployment Protection in Hong Kong in October 2021. On the one hand, academics presented findings of different research projects on the existing policy framework and its limitations, such as the Severance Payment and Unemployment Assistance; on the other hand, we also invited speakers from other academic institutions and NGOs, such as the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, to highlight the difficulties faced by the unemployed and the key role of Hong Kong SAR government to implement active labour market policy.

Unveiling young workers' experiences in precarious jobs

Regarding the expansion of precarious work and ensuing risks upon young workers, the

Institute of Policy Studies at Lingnan University organised a round table forums inviting experts in youth employment studies and practitioners of youth work in Oct 2022. Professor Pun Ngai and her research team launched a research report about young people's precarious working lives in March 2023. The research findings revealed that young workers encountered low and insecure pay, limited labour rights, and overwork. More importantly, several policy suggestions concerned with wage policy and skill formation were proposed for policymakers. A number of journalists from different media platforms joined the press conference and reported the research findings, arousing the public awareness about the need for stronger policy intervention to protect workers' incomes, jobs, and employment.

Addressing the challenges of the gig economy and platform work

Apart from the work insecurity induced by the economic downturn during the pandemic, researchers of Lingnan University also highlighted the emerging forms of workplace inequality under the gig economy. Professor Au Yeung Tat Chor and Professor Lisa Leung studied the working conditions of platform workers who engaged in digitalised intermediaries offering labour services, for example, food delivery and care services. It is suggested that the platform work displayed strong algorithmic control over workers and the risks of false self-employment. Labour insurance was lacking to protect riders from occupational accidents due to the platforms' pay cut. As part of the international Fair Work project, their research findings were not only published in academic journals but also disseminated to the public via policy research reports. These policy research reports were sent to policymakers, including the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Legislative Council for future policy changes.

Promoting labour rights and the adjustment of minimum wage

Researchers at Lingnan University also focused on the impact of uneven economic recovery on workers, especially for the wage growth and adequacy among low pay jobs. Colleagues have conducted research on low paid workers' working lives, for example, cleaning and care home workers. Additionally, policy suggestions about increasing the statutory minimum wage annually were made and published in the local media and news column, along with using social media to disseminate scholars' research findings and responses to the Policy Address and Budget.

Unlocking the Potential of Workplace Diversity: From the Management Level to the Employee Level

Contemporary organizations are witnessing increased workplace diversity, which represents

diverse attributes such as generation, ethnicity, education, and functional background in the workplace. It is now no longer possible to ignore the pervading influence of diversity in organizations. In the Asia context, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) is attracting more diverse talents with different backgrounds to make it a better place to live, thrive, and innovate. The concept of diversity is becoming a strategic priority for GBA leaders and policy makers as they hope to leverage the benefits of diversity to boost cultural exchange, technological innovation, and economic growth.

However, diversity does not always yield beneficial outcomes to organizations. Past research suggests that working in a diverse work environment (department, team, unit) creates higher instances of interpersonal conflicts, resulting in withdrawal, emotional exhaustion, and job dissatisfaction. A PwC survey (2020) revealed that while 76% of European organizations see workforce diversity as a valued strategy and practice, 36% of the respondents still feel diversity is a barrier to employee performance and well-being. Another survey in Hong Kong (2022) showed that 53% of respondents believed diversity was a barrier to career progression in their organizations and that 26% believed there is gender bias that their organizations are not addressing. Diversity researchers refer to this phenomenon as a “double-edged sword”, which means that diversity is a complex phenomenon, and a mere diverse representation is not a sufficient condition to yield diversity benefits. Organizations need to think about what strategies/actions they can take to maximize the benefits of diversity and positively respond to the challenges presented by diversity.

This report (a project conducted by Dr. Huatian Wang, huatianwang@ln.edu.hk) will answer this question by looking into how and in what conditions leaders/top management (a manager perspective) and employees themselves (an employee perspective) make the best of diversity in the workplace, unlocking its potentials and overcoming its risks.

Study 1

Using an archival dataset from 406 Chinese manufacturing firms over ten years (from 2010 to 2019), we conducted an empirical study on how functional diversity within the top management team (TMT) of an organization positively influenced organizational environmental performance. By drawing a moderated mediation model and addressing the endogeneity bias, we found that TMT functional diversity was positively associated with environmental policy disclosures, which in turn, increased organizational environmental performance. Thus, this study adds to the corporate governance and environmental management research by highlighting the beneficial role of diversity attributes at the top management level. TMT diversity is a crucial asset of an organization. (This study is now under the second-round revision and resubmission at *Group and Organization Management*.)

Study 2

Using a longitudinal survey design of 368 medical employees nested within 42 work groups over four consecutive weeks, this study examined how workgroup functional diversity can positively influence employee weekly creative performance. By conducting a three-way interaction model and using an ego-centric network measurement approach, we found that workgroup functional diversity could only positively influence employee weekly creative performance when employees engaged in weekly help-seeking behaviors and when they simultaneously scored high on openness to experience. This study highlights the important role of employee proactive behaviors and abilities in navigating a diverse work environment. (This study was published at the *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2022.2047937>)

Study 3

Using a field experimental design including 88 participants in the experimental group and 59 participants in the control group, we developed a network crafting intervention aiming to examine how network crafting strategies can enhance employee network diversity and work performance. Our results revealed that, after the intervention, employees reported an increase in three trained network crafting strategies. Moreover, through the three trained network crafting behaviors, the intervention had indirect effects on employees' network diversity and work performance (e.g., task performance and problem-solving). This study provides insights into a means to smartly shape one's social networks. Our intervention offers a management tool that employees and managers can use to guide individuals' network crafting actions and apply them in a diverse work environment. (This study is now under the second-round revision and resubmission at the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*.)

Take-home messages

- (1) Recognize the double-edged effects of workplace diversity to get a better understanding of diversity phenomena in the workplace.
- (2) In addition to organization-initiated, top-down approaches, organizations should design a job in a way that employees can engage in more self-initiated, bottom-up approaches.
- (3) Develop effective diversity-related training to help employees identify, master, and apply effective diversity management strategies in their daily work context.