



Postgraduate Seminar Series

Research Findings Seminar–No Longer Young, Not Yet Old: Configurational Antecedents of Midlife Worker Identity Conflict and Its Career Consequences through Temporal Ambidexterity

- **Date:** 27 April 2026
- **Time:** 10:30–11:30
- **Venue:** SEK108
- **Presenter:** Ms LIN Xiaoxia, PhD Student of MGT

Abstract: Midlife is a pivotal stage of career development during which employees often confront a distinctive identity challenge: they carry forward identity meanings associated with being a “younger worker” while encountering expectations tied to becoming an “older worker.” This tension manifests as midlife worker identity conflict—a perceived incompatibility between a lingering younger-worker identity and an emerging older-worker identity. In this thesis, drawing on a lifespan development perspective, I examine the antecedents of midlife worker identity conflict and its implications for career development outcomes across two empirical essays. Moving beyond single-factor explanations, Essay 1 investigates how multiple antecedent conditions combine into configurations associated with high and non-high midlife worker identity conflict. Using survey data from 670 full-time midlife employees across diverse industries and applying fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), it examines how four aging experiences (i.e., personal growth, gaining self-knowledge, physical loss, and social loss) combine with two value orientations (i.e., self-enhancement values and self-transcendence values) to produce high and non-high midlife worker identity conflict. The findings identify multiple antecedent configurations sufficient for high midlife worker identity conflict, whereas the configurations associated with non-high conflict are not simply the inverse of those associated with high conflict. These findings underscore that midlife worker identity conflict is not a uniform outcome of aging, but rather a product of specific constellations of aging experiences and value orientations. Essay 2 examines the career development implications of midlife worker identity conflict. This essay introduces temporal ambidexterity, defined as the capacity to orient mentally to both younger- and older-worker identities in the present, as a key coping mechanism through which employees navigate midlife worker identity conflict to advance their careers. Using a multi-wave, multi-source field study of 382 midlife employees and their coworkers, I find that midlife worker identity conflict has positive indirect effects on career identity progression and creativity via temporal ambidexterity. At the same time, it has a negative indirect effect, via temporal ambidexterity, on the likelihood of exploring beyond one’s primary professional domain rather than focusing within it. I further show that the AI replacement threat, a salient contemporary manifestation of environmental disruption, amplifies these indirect effects. Together, these two essays offer a more complete account of midlife at work by identifying configurational antecedents through which midlife worker identity conflict emerges, unpacking temporal ambidexterity as the coping mechanism through which such identity conflict shapes career development outcomes, and specifying AI replacement threat as a salient contextual contingency that amplifies these dynamics.

All are welcome

Contact:

- For any inquiries, please contact us at hkibs@ln.edu.hk or call us at 2616-8374.