

Take 3

~ With Prof Emily David

■ By Charmaine N Clarke

Humour in the workplace is the topic that CEIBS Assistant Professor of Management Emily David would love to immerse herself in thoroughly researching if there were no constraints at all. She is particularly intrigued by the possibility of exploring this topic through a cultural lens in order to understand how things like stress and performance are impacted by “who thinks what is funny - and why”. It’s not surprising that she wants to study humour. A 30-minute conversation with her is full of laughter. It’s also liberally sprinkled with words and phrases that evoke a sense of adventure and the exotic – NASA International Space Station, Dubai, and Bolivia.

She joined CEIBS in mid-2016 after a stint in the United Arab Emirates where she complemented her role as an academic with mentoring participants in a female empowerment programme. Years before, she had also lived in Bolivia. Her experiences as an expatriate, like many other aspects of her life, have

shaped the direction of her academic research. Now she’s in Shanghai, where, in addition to giving her all to her students she is enjoying the culinary delights. “I just want to give a personal shout out to whoever invented xiao long bao. I’m a really huge fan,” she says with a mischievous laugh as our interview ends. “I love that stuff, I eat it every week. That’s one of my favourite parts of living here!”



At NASA International Space Station

Read on as *TheLINK* gets Prof Emily David’s candid replies to three questions.

TheLINK: Why did you choose organisational psychology as your field of expertise?

My whole life I wanted to do something that was meaningful but also intellectually challenging. I started off with the more typical thoughts of becoming a lawyer or doctor. Then in high school, I think it was, I took a psychology class and I thought, “This is it! I love the human brain”. But then I quickly realised that I couldn’t listen to people’s problems all day long [laughs]. Then I thought about the fact that adults spend about a quarter of their lives at work, so that’s somewhere where I can really have an impact. That’s how I ended up in industrial/organisational psychology.

There is this idea that researchers tend to pick things that are personally relevant to them – research is “me-search”. It seems to be true in my case. I started off in culture and diversity because I had an early expat experience in Bolivia. It was the experience of being so different that made me really want to figure out how organisations can make



RATIO - VALUE CREATION



$$\text{RATIO} = \frac{\text{LTV}}{\text{CAC}} = \frac{\text{LIFETIME VALUE}}{\text{CUSTOMER ACQUISITION}}$$

ATION RULES.



VALUE OF NETWORKS FEATURE 63

ETHERNET INVENTOR - BOB METCALFE

$$\text{VALUE OF CONNECTIONS} = \frac{n(n-1)}{2} \#$$

- NODES ARE NOT ALL HOMOGENEOUS
- LIMIT OF PABICAL
- COST OF EACH CONNECTION

Fast Facts

Research & teaching interests:
 Culture & Diversity; Personality & Individual Differences; Leadership; Business Leadership; Organisational Behaviour; Cultural Psychology.

Tip for being a hit with students and / or employees:

Being a good manager is really similar to being a good teacher. It takes a lot of the same things. If you want your students or your employees to go above and beyond, you have to be willing to do that yourself.



ALFE \approx ALFE LAW# OF NODES
OF CONNECTIONS

$$\text{as } n \rightarrow \infty$$

$$\frac{n(n-1)}{2} \rightarrow \frac{n^2}{2}$$



you feel less different.

Later on, I studied personality because I was interested in why a lot of my really smart friends didn't do well in school or at work. They had the brain power to succeed, but maybe personality (organisational skills or the ability to deal with other people) was the missing component. Recognising that our personalities are not easily changed, I then got into cultural intelligence and resiliency and some other individual differences that people can actually work on adjusting.

Finally, I also research work-family issues and job burnout. This was, in part, a result of looking at my own life and other women that I knew who were trying to juggle their personal and professional lives and "have it all". I resented the fact that employees had to do all the juggling [laughs]. Why can't the organisations help out a little bit with some of this? In a nutshell, that's where I ended up – and why – in terms of my research.

TheLINK: What has been the most

memorable experience from your research so far?

I was working at NASA, and we were looking at cross-cultural interactions on the International Space Station. I would sit there and code hours of video of Russian and American astronauts interacting with each other. In terms of research, that was just really *not normal*, and it was fascinating! But in terms of the coolest recent discovery, that came from a study on expatriates that I'm working on right now.

We counter-intuitively found that familiarity in your new country isn't necessarily a good thing. A lot of us are the same, we move to a different country and we immediately see if we can find things that are familiar: our favourite cereal, the clothing brand we like. And all of us kind of gravitate to those things. But what we found in our research was that if you lived in a country that had all those familiar things from back home, you are actually less committed to the organisation in which you work unless they go the extra mile to help you assimilate. We find that whenever



Researchers tend to pick things that are personally relevant to them.



you do have some of these perks, or some of these things that remind you of home, that's when it's really critical for the organisation to train you in the new norms, to introduce you to more of the local people, to really embed you in the community, to make sure that you don't leave their company early. So that was kind of a surprising finding.

If I had no constraints and I could choose any topic at all to research, the thing that I would love to focus on is humour in the work place. I see that it has good effects, it can really smooth over relationships and it helps you get through a job that you don't like. But every time I try and study it, I don't get the strong empirical results that I'm looking for. So I'd really like to spend more time doing that. I'd probably do more culture-related studies also, if time and resources weren't an issue, as it is so



difficult to get a big enough sample from each of the different countries that you're trying

to compare. So maybe combining the two together would be my ideal topic: who thinks what is funny, and why, and how is that going to impact performance and motivation in different countries.

TheLINK: You're originally from the US; you've lived and worked in Bolivia, Dubai, etc. Why China, why now and why CEIBS?

I was looking for something different and Asia was somewhere that I hadn't lived before and, most importantly, China is the future. That's where everything is going. I want to be there when that change is happening. And at CEIBS, one of the best business schools in the world, you know they're guaranteed to have a front row seat. All the stars kind of aligned, and I can't think of a better place that I'd want to be right now.

Also, I love to eat and I love to travel. So Shanghai is a perfect place for me because I can walk two streets over and it feels like I've travelled to a completely different city. I love that! You can experience something new every day; and in terms of food, whether you want street food or a Michelin-star restaurant, it has it all. So I'm very happy here.

