

# MYTHBUSTERS



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*Debunker: Christopher Shen's work skewers a few beliefs.*

MANAGEMENT GURUS don't always get it right. Christopher Shen, a Melbourne-based organisational psychologist, and Simon Moss, a senior lecturer in psychology at Monash University, have ferreted out nearly 1000 examples – ranging from failed leadership programs to bogus HR policies and practices – where management experts' theory doesn't match reality. Shen and Moss examined more than 20,000 articles across a range of disciplines in a bid to debunk popularly held beliefs. Here are some of the top management fallacies.

**Myth No 1:** During tough times, leaders should draw upon mistakes to inspire and motivate better employee performance. Wrong. Research suggests when a workplace is floundering, leaders should focus on inspirational goals. When a workplace is flourishing, the focus should be on past events.

**Myth No 2:** Bold, confident, robust and resilient employees should be rewarded. This type of employee is reluctant to express concerns, anxieties or distress. "They perceive themselves as competent but endure an incessant, underlying sense of doubt and uncertainty," says Shen. He says employees who express concerns are often more stable and resilient.

**Myth No 3:** Goals should be lofty and inspiring. Lofty goals and aspirations don't motivate; rather, research indicates that unfulfilled hopes and aspirations can lead to dejection and depression. Leaders need to set realistic and measurable goals.

**Myth No 4:** There's no "I" in team. The price of mob mentality is a loss of individual identity.

Employees should be encouraged to break the mould and be themselves.

**Myth No 5:** Rewards motivate. Research shows as soon as a reward (other than pay) is attached to a task, employees perceive the experience as less fulfilling. Shen recommends incentives be similar to the activity being completed to "underscore the delights, not the tedium" of the task.

**Myth No 6:** Inspirational speeches encourage high performance. The words leaders use enthuse some but demoralise others. Shen says there are two categories: "feeling", "intuition" or "sense" words stir employees to engage in tasks that enhance their emotions; but words that relate to rationality (eg "sensible" or "reasonable") appeal to workers who prefer to complete tasks and earn bonuses.

**Myth No 7:** Risk has its rewards. Leaders often encourage employees to pursue a risky activity without giving much thought to preparation – the so-called "sink or swim" tactic. Shen says this perpetuates the belief that risk is acceptable.

**Myth No 8:** Getting to know each other builds trust. But Shen says research indicates that the more you know about someone, the less likely you'll be inclined to like them.

**Myth No 9:** The bigger the challenge the better. Leaders often feel the need to talk about strategies and objectives, but communicate little about progress. Research indicates that people are more likely to become committed to a steep goal in which some progress has already been achieved.

**BRAD HATCH**

## SHIRT FRONT

IT STARTED in Europe, and now it's hit the Australian corporate world: women are getting decidedly shirty about ill-fitting chemises. Female business shirts either fit the shoulders perfectly but strain around the bust, or they hug the chest and sag shapelessly around the rest. As a result, women of the world are growing ever more hot under the collar about the shortage of smart shirts tailored specifically for the female form.

"There's been a resurgence in the notion of bespoke [made-to-order] in women's shirts in Europe, with London's Savile Row starting to attract a younger female audience for made-to-measure shirts," says Karen Webster, director of the 2007 L'Oréal Melbourne Fashion Festival. "It's a culture of personal dressing that's starting to evolve here now too."

Certainly, Australian shirts are beginning to dress up in response to demand, with the launch of Mr Rose, a company producing a range of women's business shirts that also factors in different bust sizes. "You have to think a lot of women's shirts are designed by men who don't seem to realise that women come in all different shapes," says director Sophie Toohey.

The company is bringing in crisp cottons and Chantilly lace from Europe, for shirts to be designed and manufactured in Sydney. The range comes in many styles, including the Classico with oversized French cuffs; the man-style shirt Man-Oh-Man; and a female take on the classic Tuxedo. Sizes range from Bud (A/B cup) to Blossom (B/C cup) and Bloom (C/D cup).

At shirtmaker Herringbone, which has 10 stores in Australia, the women's range of shirts has recently increased, while the custom-made service is also growing. And one of Australia's oldest shirtmakers, Hemden at Armadale, is planning to introduce a new range of women's shirts later this year.

**SUE WILLIAMS**

*If the shirt fits: The Classico, by Mr Rose*