

Publication: The Straits Times

Date: 30 August 2016

Headline: In an economic downturn, we are less inclined to help each other at work, study finds

In an economic downturn, we are less inclined to help each other at work, study finds



SINGAPORE - When the going gets tough, it's tough luck at the workplace

We help our fellow workers less during economic downturns, the times when such help is needed the most, research by the Singapore Management University and Insead found.

The reason: Zero-sum thinking takes hold when times are bad, making us view a colleague's success as coming at our expense.

The research was undertaken by SMU associate professor of organisational behaviour & human resources Marko Pitesa and Nina Sirola of graduate business school Insead, and published in the Academy of Management Journal.

Source: The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Permission required for reproduction.

Publication: The Straits Times

Date: 30 August 2016

Headline: In an economic downturn, we are less inclined to help each other at work, study finds

They began by studying data from some 60,000 respondents surveyed across 51 countries and 17 years. They then tested their findings in two separate experiments.

Through these four studies, the researchers found that cues which signal that the economy is performing poorly trigger a way of thinking and perceiving among employees that the success of one person implies less success for others.

This psychological consequence, which they refer to a "zero-sum construal of success", makes employees less inclined to help each other, as they view the success of one as "exhausting a limited pool of successful outcomes."

Said Professor Pitesa said, "This research uncovers a curious irrational psychological flaw that makes people respond to news of economic slowdowns in a way that aggravate the very economic problems that prompted the reaction.

"My co-author and I believe that the findings have broad implications for managers, and are particularly relevant in the current dynamics and unpredictable global economic climate."

The researchers recommend that managers try to interfere with the zero-sum thinking that economic downturns bring about. One way is to develop a strong cooperative and collective culture and emphasize it when hard times hit.