



SMU's Assistant Professor of Finance Gennaro Bernile (right) receiving the Ig Nobel Prize with his co-researcher, Professor Raghavendra Rau, during the 2015 Prize Ceremony at Harvard University last month. PHOTO: IMPROBABLE RESEARCH

ScienceFaces

SMU professor bags prize for 'improbable research'

Audrey Tan

As Nobel fever hits its peak this week, an assistant professor from the Singapore Management University (SMU) has won an Ig Nobel Prize, becoming the only researcher from Singapore on this year's list of 10 winners.

The Ig Nobel Prize is a parody of the Nobel Prize awards and is given out every year at Harvard University in the United States. It recognises "improbable research... that makes people laugh, and then think".

Assistant Professor of Finance Gennaro Bernile, from the SMU Lee Kong Chian School of Business, is the third winner from Singapore in the prize's 24-year history.

Prof Bernile, who received the award last month, clinched the prize in the management category for his research on the influence of early-life disasters on the behaviour of chief executive officers.

He had found that many business leaders who experienced natural disasters, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis or wildfires, developed a fondness for risk-taking in their childhood, provided the disasters had no dire personal consequences for them.

"While the Ig Nobel Prize is known for appealing to the masses by focusing on the outrageous and humorous at the onset, which may be embarrassing at first, the scientific value of the seemingly funny or out-of-the-ordinary research sinks in soon after," Prof Bernile said.

"It is certainly a distinguished honour... to have won the Prize that lived up to its vision of helping more people notice remarkable research in the first place, spurring them to think and understand more about the benefits and applications, and encouraging more creativity and inquisition, after some good laughs."

Other winners this year include Dr Mark Dingemanse, a research staff member from the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in

the Netherlands, who shared the prize in the literature category with two of his colleagues.

They discovered that the word "huh" and its equivalent seem to exist in every human language, although they are not quite sure why.

On Prof Bernile's achievement, SMU dean of the Lee Kong Chian School of Business Gerry George said he was delighted that Prof Bernile had won the prize for "research that is not only revealing, but also relevant to business".

Dr George, who is also Professor of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, added: "His findings...could shed light on why Singaporeans might be less risk-taking across generations because the imprinting effect of individual hardship when young has now changed.

"Successive generational wealth and comfort removed the need to be risk-taking and entrepreneurial."

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WHY RISK-TAKING IS VANISHING

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SMU DEAN OF THE LEE KONG CHIAN SCHOOL OF BUSINESS GERRY GEORGE, on Assistant Professor Gennaro Bernile's Ig Nobel Prize-winning research