THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT & MARKETING
DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH SEMINAR

Pit Sense: The Rise and Fall of Tacit Knowledge in a Coal Time

By

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Date: Monday, 5 October 2009
Time: 2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Venue: M802

All interested are welcome
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ABSTRACT

Prof. Ken Kamoche
Dr Kevin Maguire

Coal miners around the world use what they call pit sense to navigate and assess risks in a dangerous subterranean work environment. Pit sense is like a sixth sense, a gut feeling, an instinct cultivated over years and understood only by those with first-hand experience of the mining world. We argue that pit-sense is also a form of socially-constructed knowledge which appears to be largely tacit, situated and contested. With regard to a UK coal mine situated in West Yorkshire, we consider how pit sense came to be constituted by miners as a way to define their every-day work and to determine acceptable levels of risk in a hostile and harsh environment. We discuss how this form of tacit knowledge came to be challenged when management introduced bureaucratic procedures rationalized in terms of health and safety. Interestingly, while managers were in general prone to reject and deride pit sense even though they had grown up with it as they rose through the ranks, they were prepared to turn a blind eye to it as long as it delivered financial returns. We examine the nature and implications of this managerial ambivalence towards pit sense, and discuss how efforts to codify and ‘normalize’ tacit knowledge not only threaten its legitimacy, but also constitute a reformulation of power relations.

Speaker:
Professor Ken Kamoche is a Professor of Human Resource Management at Nottingham Trent University. He obtained his DPhil at Oxford University. His work on HRM, improvisation and knowledge management has appeared in journals such as the Journal of Management Studies, Organization Studies, Human Relations etc. He has also published a number of books, including Understanding Human Resource Management.