

# THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING

## Departmental Research Seminar



### No Problems in My Organization! How Trustworthiness of Leaders Inhibits Employee Voice under Ambiguous Threats By

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Date : 21 Apr 2021 (WED)

Time : 9 am – 10:30 am

Venue : Online via Zoom

#### Abstract

Integrating research on the negative side of trust and organizational threats, we propose that employees can sometimes *fail to notice problems*, or recognize vulnerabilities in their products or processes to withstand emerging market and task demands. This tendency can prevent them from developing and speaking out with ideas to increase the internal fitness of their units. We argue that failure to notice problems especially occurs when two conditions are simultaneously present: Employees are working with *trustworthy managers*—those seen as capable and benevolent individuals who can take care of the good of the unit—and when units are faced with *ambiguous threats*—or threats whose constituent elements are complex and not clearly understood. We examine and demonstrate support for this idea in a set of four studies—a qualitative pilot study, two online experiments and a correlational field study. We thereby highlight how voice might not emerge even in conditions that are psychologically safe and instrumental when employees do not experience a latent dissatisfaction with the status-quo as well as how units with respected leadership can often fail to internally prepare themselves for more ambiguous threats that can be as harmful to units as clearer threats.

**Prof. Subra Tangirala** is Dean's Professor of Management. He teaches the leadership course in the MBA program. In his research, he explores reasons why employees often remain silent despite having information, concerns, or suggestions to share, and what organizations can do to facilitate candid exchange of ideas at the workplace. His research has been published in academic journals such as the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Organizational Science*, *Organizational Behavior* and *Human Decision Processes*, and *Personnel Psychology*. He received his PhD in organizational behavior and human resources from Purdue University. Prior to his doctoral studies, he worked for several years as a human resources manager.

**All interested are welcome.**



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