“They Know there is a social work scholar in the room when...”

Michàlle E. Mor Barak, Ph.D.
Dean’s Professor of Social Work and Business

USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work
University of Southern California
Outline

1. Interdisciplinary Collaboration – a Case Example
2. PhD Students’ Reflections
3. Tips for Chairs of Doctoral Programs
Part 1: Case Example

International and Interdisciplinary Lean Manufacturing
Cross-cultural Intervention
Interdisciplinary Research Team

School of Business Team
Data Science and Operations

Sriram Dasu
Ravi Kumar

School of Social Work Team
Diversity and Cross Cultural

Margarita Artavia
Michèlle Mor Barak
Cindy Hsiau

Harold Pyun
MinKyoung Rhee
Erica Lizano
Intervention

• Training in Lean Concepts
• Training in Cross-cultural communication
• Conversion to Lean Manufacturing
The “Huddle”

Empowering workers to:

• Identify problems
• Come up with solutions
• Rely on teamwork
Cross-Cultural Training Modules

1. Mutual Respect
2. Cross-cultural communication
3. Balancing work-family
Breaking down barriers between the Korean Managers and the Mexican workers
“There is a very important difference in regard to the quality and the communication among management, supervisors and co-workers in the line.”
Part 2:
Doctoral Students’ Reflections on Interdisciplinary Research Teams

“Room for interdisciplinary engagement”
Doctoral Students’ Reflections on the Project

What have you learned from this collaboration and what challenges did you face?

- Whenever I think of the word "interdisciplinary," I remember what I have experienced through this project. It was a good example for me as a doctoral student of how different disciplines could collaborate to pursue their own research aims and yet serve a bigger goal by creating synergy between the two fields.

- One of the common challenges in conducting an interdisciplinary project would be having clear communications in sharing the research approach, methods, and results among participating disciplines so that they pursue unified goal.

- It was an eye-opening experience. I learned that it was much more effective to address a problem from different disciplines to solve a social problem.
Doctoral Students’ Reflections on the Project

How did this experience contribute to your development as a scholar and researcher?

- Having this experience as a student enabled me to draw an overall picture about how interdisciplinary research collaborations work.
- It has helped me reduce my fear of engaging in interdisciplinary research opportunities as a junior scholar.
- I was able to learn how other disciplines approach research differently from social work to address the same social problem.
What unique perspectives do social work scholars bring to the interdisciplinary team?

- Deep understanding of varied contexts (e.g., environmental, social, cultural, etc) when addressing social phenomena
- Qualitative methodologies providing in-depth insights on needs of workers, managers, employers, and local communities.
- Good understanding and skills of how to engage with study participants or community organizations that other disciplines may not have
“I think ‘interdisciplinary’ means getting a detention from more than one teacher.”
Confident Scholars in a Transdisciplinary World

“Be careful - they sense fear.”
Confidence, or lack of, can make the difference in our PhD students ability and willingness to engage in interdisciplinary research teams.
3 ways to boost our PhD students’ confidence in interdisciplinary research teams

1. Get students exposed to interdisciplinary research early on --
   • Require that they take courses in other disciplines
   • Invite doctoral students from other disciplines to your courses
   • Have doc students take tutorials with professors from other disciplines

2. Students need to learn the “language” of other disciplines --
   • Have them read papers from other disciplines
   • Require participation in colloquia in other schools
   • Require participation in conferences of other disciplines

3. Give students hands-on experience in interdisciplinary research
   • Have the faculty who do interdisciplinary research give seminars
   • Collaborate with other disciplines to mentor your doc students
   • Train students on how to present themselves with confidence in interdisciplinary meetings
Thank you!

Michèlle E. Mor Barak morbarak@usc.edu