

## Professor David P. Lepak



Photo source: Bruce Skaggs, Head of Department of Management, Isenberg School of Management, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Professor David Lepak died unexpectedly on December 7, 2017, driving from Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, to his home in Amherst, Massachusetts. Dave had been working at the University of Massachusetts Amherst as the Douglas and Diana Berthiaume Endowed Chair in the Isenberg School of Management since January 2016. Before that, he was a professor at Rutgers University (2003–2007 and 2008–2015), University of Bath in the UK (2007–2008), and University of Maryland (1998–2003), teaching Human Resource Management (HRM) courses to thousands of students from undergraduates to executives.

Dave was an internationally renowned scholar in HRM. In his 23-year academic career, he edited a handbook of HRM and published two textbooks, 18 book chapters and approximately 46 academic articles in top-tier, peer-reviewed journals such as *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Management*, and *Personnel Psychology*. Dave's articles won several prestigious research awards including the Scholarly Achievement Award and the International HRM Scholarly Research Award from the HR Division of the Academy of Management. His research has nearly 17,000 citations, with 10 articles cited over 500 times according to Google Scholar (accessed January 15, 2018). His textbook, *Human Resource Management: Managing Employees for Competitive Advantage* (coauthored with Mary Gowan) is in its 3rd edition and has been adapted for international use. At the time of his death, he was in the process of coauthoring one additional textbook of management and more than a dozen research papers.

Dave's distinguished research career began in his PhD program at Pennsylvania State University (PhD, 1998), where the faculty knew him as having a "sarcastic wit without being hurtful," someone whose work was "highly respected" and who was "equally respected as a person," and a student who had "perspective, insight, and the ability to get things done." Fellow students cherished his "sense of humour," "fun-loving nature and balanced perspective," "supportive friendship," and "amazing work ethic, which led him to graduate the program a year early." (See acknowledgements for personal communications.) It is during his PhD program that he became interested in the strategic role of HRM in contributing to firm performance. His contributions to the strategic management of human capital are represented by his seminal work on the human resource architecture, published in *Academy of Management Review* (Lepak & Snell, 1999) and *Journal of Management* (Lepak & Snell, 2002; Lepak, Takeuchi, & Snell, 2003). Contrary to

earlier beliefs, this work argued that because not all employees possess knowledge and skills of equal strategic importance, organisations should adopt different employment modes based on the strategic value and uniqueness of employees' skills and knowledge to achieve competitive advantage. In later work, Dave and his colleagues helped uncover the "black box" explaining the relationship between HRM systems and firm performance by empirically showing that employee skills, motivation, and behaviour mediate the effects of human resource systems on firm performance (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012; Messersmith, Patel, Lepak, & Gould-Williams, 2011; Patel, Messersmith, & Lepak, 2013; Takeuchi, Lepak, Wang, & Takeuchi, 2007).

In much of his work, Dave advocated for the use of multilevel theories and methods in strategic HRM research. His articles published in *Journal of Applied Psychology* (Liao, Toya, Lepak, & Hong, 2009) and *Personnel Psychology* (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008; Takeuchi, Chen, & Lepak, 2009) are considered exemplars of how to examine the cross-level influence of HRM systems on individual outcomes, and this work opened a new avenue to explore the influence of HRM systems on employees. Recently, he began to explore time issues in HRM research by theorising about the longitudinal effects of HRM systems over time (e.g., Lepak, Jiang, Kehoe, & Bentley, 2018; Lepak, Jiang, & Ployhart, 2017). In addition to his large body of research on strategic HRM, Dave published on a variety of other topics, such as virtual HRM, international HRM, and expatriate management. Many future HR scholars undoubtedly will continue to build on, and learn from, Dave's published research.

Throughout his academic career, Dave was known for being a supportive faculty mentor for young scholars in HRM. In addition to the many doctoral and master's thesis committees he served on, Dave chaired the dissertation committee for nine students. Dave always inspired students to be the best of themselves. He gave students the confidence to become capable scholars even before they believed in themselves. He cared about students' well-being and was always ready to promote and protect his students. He gave students honest suggestions and respected their decisions. He did whatever he could to support his students but never took credit for their accomplishments. Out of his 46 journal publications, 24 (52%) were coauthored with his students. Dave clearly was committed to fostering the scholarly achievements of his students.

In addition to his scholarly contributions, Dave strongly believed in giving back to the profession. He served in numerous editorial roles, always striving to improve the quality of work we do as a professional field. At the time of his death, he was the Senior Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* and served on eight editorial boards including *Human Resource Management Journal*. He was past Associate Editor of *Academy of Management Review* (2008–2011) and *British Journal of Management* (2005–2008). Among editors, he was known for submitting high quality, developmental, and timely reviews. He also cared deeply about providing professional development to scholars within the Academy of Management. In addition to being a regular invited panellist in doctoral consortia and PDWs for many years, Dave had just completed his 5-year rotation as an elected officer of the HR Division (2012–2017). During his time as an officer, Dave was a strong advocate for increasing services and conference activities to benefit the HR Division members outside of the United States and those members in institutions that were less research-oriented. In these roles, he had a great ability to recognise what's important (and thus "let's get this right") versus what just doesn't really matter (so, "let's not waste our time"). He ran meetings efficiently and was always happy to continue the conversation over a beer. He made decisions with fairness, respect toward others, and always based on what was best for the members of the HR Division. Dave also helped found the Strategic Human Capital Interest Group and was the Inaugural Program Chair and then Interest Group Chair (2009–2012), in the Strategic Management Society. The many journals for which Dave edited or reviewed, the HR Division of the Academy of Management and the Strategic Human Capital Interest Group have all greatly benefited from Dave's insight and generosity.

Dave Lepak (46) died much too young. His death is a considerable loss for the many people who had the privilege to work with him. Dave was a wonderful friend, colleague, and devoted husband and father. He is survived by his wife, Ellen, and their four children, Riley, Addie, Henry, and Rowan. Above all else, they were his *raison d'être*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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