Cutting risk of staff turnover

All candidates for the CityU DBA are encouraged to choose a thesis topic with real relevance for their own industry and others, too. Sean Kuan Thye was able to do just that with research that focused on ways to reduce the risk of employee turnover among call centre agents in the Asia-Pacific context.

"Voluntary turnover is costly and disruptive for many businesses," explains the managing director of organisation and rewards for FedEx Express Asia Pacific. "Getting selection right is one of the best interventions, so I wanted to identify pre-hire predictors to help screen out job applicants who would show a higher risk of turnover."

A key aim of the research was to further the case for using biographical information (biodata) and personality traits as valid predictors. Also important, if the findings were to be applied in real-world situations, was to ensure that the selected biodata would be factual, legitimate, theory-based and verifiable.

At times, Sean admits, it was tough going particularly after the second year, but support from CityU's academic staff, statistician and librarians proved invaluable when it came to trying different research methodologies and reviewing the literature.

Armed with her research, Sean Kuan Thye is advancing the case for the use of biodata.

"I felt I was connected to a knowledgeable and professional team of experts who were always ready to offer guidance," Sean says. "I could also tap into the network of DBA alumni and discuss any problems with fellow students, who were inspiring learning partners and always generous in sharing their knowledge."

Sean believes the programme structure, with core modules, electives and lectures building towards a research proposal and thesis, was a good way to get acquainted with the demands of the course and to understand the time management required. "I also treasured the advice of the professors on the pre-admission interview panel about the need to

persevere and be determined to complete the thesis."

Now, Sean is converting some of her key findings into an article for publication and, quite naturally, is also applying them to improve her company's selection and retention process.

Her overall advice for future DBA candidates is to plan meetings and conference calls with your supervisor on a regular basis and to stay on track by avoiding the distraction of other commitments when necessary. "You should also leverage the alumni and learning partner network as you prepare your research proposal. And be methodical in collecting and analysing the data you will need to write up the thesis."