



THE monday morning MYTH



PROF. CHARLES ARENI

Monday morning blues and Friday afternoon highs are more myth than reality, according to a prominent new study by a Faculty of Economics and Business researcher

IT IS A common topic of conversation in Australian workplaces to bemoan the Monday morning return to work and celebrate the approach of Friday afternoons. But do our moods really change according to the days of the week, as concepts like Mondayitis and Thank God It's Friday would suggest?

Professor Charles Areni from the Faculty's Discipline of Marketing together with marketing consultant Mitchell Burger decided to find out. They asked 702 Australians to remember how they felt on past days of the week and to predict how they would feel during the week to come. Not surprisingly, the participants remembered and predicted Monday mornings as low points and Friday evenings as high points of their week.

But when the participants reported their moods several times throughout the week, and were asked how they felt at that specific moment, the results painted a very different picture.

"Monday mornings were not the low point of the week, and although Friday and Saturday evenings were associated with positive moods, they

were no better than moods reported on Tuesdays," Areni says.

"What we found is that actual moods don't seem to vary systematically throughout the week. As it turned out, the low point of the week in our data was Wednesday, not Monday, but the effect was barely noticeable compared to how people remembered feeling in the past."

As the researcher explains, the source of these stereotypes about days of the week is a pervasive cultural belief that we are happier when we have the freedom to choose how we spend our time, as opposed to when we are compelled to do something. "Monday morning is remembered and predicted to be the worst part of the week because it is the first work day after two days of free time, and because four work days follow," he says. "Likewise, Friday evening is the best part of the week because it marks the beginning of an extended period of free time."

But in reality, according to Areni, the minute-by-minute activities we engage in each day are much more important

factors in our current mood than what day of the week it is. "For example, on a recent Friday evening, I didn't know where my wallet was, so that's what determined how I felt," he says. "I was stressed because I thought I lost my wallet, not happy because it was Friday night."

The study, which was published in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* and generated media attention from around the world, contributes to a wider body of research on our ability to identify sources of happiness.

It may also have some practical implications for how we spend our time, Areni suggests, because many of our consumption patterns are linked to the stereotypes we have about different days. For example, we tend to consume more alcohol on the weekend because it is viewed as a time for partying, while we avoid going out to dinner on Monday evenings because the beginning of the week is not considered a time for enjoying ourselves. "If people are made aware it is an illusion that your moods follow this pattern, it might alter their behaviour on these days," he says.