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We Are Who We Teach

How Teaching Experienced Managers Fractures Our Scholarship

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It is argued that teaching is more important to shared understanding of management and organizations than scholars acknowledge. Teaching has been ignored in discussions of scholars' intellectual enterprise, in part, because of a practicality that violates Romantic Era ideals of intellectuals as otherworldly and pure. Yet teachers in conversation with their students have always been central to how students learn and develop their ideas. In the case of management professors, who they teach (students with management experience), the institutional context in which they teach them (tuition-dependent and rankings-focused university business schools), and the publishing industry (increasingly focused on lower-division books for teenagers) are as much causes of the fractured visage of management scholarship as are any actions of the field's elites. Implications for action include more open conversations about how MBA teaching influences our intellectual work and the development of coherent books for experienced adult students.

Keywords: *teaching; paradigm; MBA*

Our responsibilities as teachers have been analyzed and debated throughout our history, most recently in its own specialized journal, *Academy of Management Learning and Education*. There are countless analyses of the processes of teaching, how the characteristics of students affect how management should be taught, and complaints that teaching is insufficiently valued in research universities, among the many, many observations on management teaching. All of this, and yet no one seems to have thought much about how who we teach affects the intellectual development of our scholarship. Not how we teach, but who and what we teach. The importance of our teaching to our scholarship is

largely ignored. It almost seems that we have internalized the oft-expressed complaint that teaching gets no respect by ignoring its role in how we construct our scholarship and think about our research. Here I will propose that who we teach (students with management experience), and the institutional context in which we teach them (tuition-dependent and rankings-focused university business schools), is as much a cause of the fractured visage of management scholarship as any actions of the field's elites. The argument serves both to suggest more practical courses of action to address the fractured visage and to reintroduce readers to the intellectual importance of teaching.

MANAGEMENT SCHOLARSHIP'S FRACTURED VISAGE

Pfeffer's 1993 lament about the underdevelopment of paradigms in the field of management launched a wide-ranging conversation about the fractured state of knowledge in management scholarship. He argued that this "fractured visage" was costly for many reasons, but most importantly because "consensus is a vital component for the advancement of knowledge in the field" (p. 611). If we cannot agree on what we study and how to go about it, it is hard to make progress in our understanding of management. Overly fractured disciplines consist of too many autistic conversations, with no one listening to, disagreeing with, or improving on others' insights. Pfeffer also detailed the costs to those working in fractured fields: wasted effort from too many rejected manuscripts and fewer university resources than fields with more consensus on the important problems and methods. Glick, Miller, and Cardinal (in press) further detail the costs, emphasizing that junior faculty members seeking tenure bear the heaviest consequences. In contrast, Cannella and Paetzold (1994), De Cock and Jeanes (2006), and Van Maanen (1995) see our intellectual diversity as a sign of creative intellectual health. Nevertheless, whether they see it as a good thing or a bad thing, all attribute our fractured visage to the various institutions of the research publication enterprise. Rather than looking again at the usual suspects, I suggest that the fractured visage of management intellectual work is more severe than many of the other social sciences, not because our research institutions or elites are any different but because our teaching is different.

Pfeffer (1993) suggested our fractured visage could be blamed on an absence of elite enforcement of theoretical and methodological conformity, whereas Glick et al. (in press) added journal reviewers selected for their intellectual diversity and an absence of reviewer performance accountability. Furthermore, Hazlett, McAdam, and Gallagher (2005) blame the different social science disciplinary bases of management scholarship. I am sure these all have a role to play.

Certainly, no one expects any social science discipline to have the same consensus of the physical sciences. Burrell and Morgan (1979) argue that the social sciences are expected to be more fragmented than the physical sciences because their object of study is less tangible, is more changeable, and often are abstractions themselves. Yet, as Pfeffer (1993) noted, management is more fractured than many of the other social

sciences, and yet all of the social sciences share the same university and publication contexts, so these invariant research performance evaluation and publication practices cannot account for the especially fractured visage of management scholarship. Rather, an important cause has been neglected: the teaching of experienced master's of business administration (MBA) students.

THE INVISIBILITY OF TEACHING

It isn't surprising that teaching is ignored in discussions of our intellectual enterprise, in our own field or in any other. Teaching too often is considered the less demanding task done to pay the bills (Lewis & Doyno, 1983). It has been disparaged as "women's work" and devalued as less respected than scholarly publications in all of the social sciences (Park, 1996). Perhaps for this reason, the role of teaching has been ignored as a contributor to the advancement of ideas or as playing any role in scholarship.

However, this assumption that teaching and intellectual advancement are separate domains is a historically recent phenomenon. It reflects the Romantic Era notion that true, authentic artists and intellectuals are disengaged and isolated from their societies (Pelles, 1963). During the early industrial revolution in Europe, the idea arose that the best intellectuals are not "bourgeois" but are critics of their societies and should strive to express their deeply personal vision. Hoekema (1991) argues that what he called this "false ideology of intellectual work" remains powerful to this day. Because teaching is a practical task directly engaged with society, and because that is what we do to maintain our comfortable bourgeois lifestyles, in Romantic ideology, teaching is work that sullies intellectuals by bringing them into the service of their societies rather than the more ideologically pure role of opposition to society.

Prior to the Romantic Era ideology of the alienation of intellectuals from their societies, teaching was considered central to the advancement of ideas. After all, Aristotle's famous line, "Plato (my teacher) is dear to me, but dearer still is the truth,"¹ reflects the centrality of teaching, and disagreements between students and teachers, to the pursuit of truth. In Eastern cultures, teachers are revered, and to be considered a teacher is a great honor. The actual interplay of teaching and intellectual advancement is acknowledged by the aphorism, "You cannot really know a subject until you

teach it." There is even empirical evidence that teaching is associated with the advancement of scholarship. Stack (2003), among many others, finds a significant positive relationship between student evaluations of teaching performance and instructors' research productivity. We often have assumed this is because better researchers make better teachers, but perhaps it is because better teachers make better researchers. The centrality of teaching to intellectual advancement also reflects the practical experience all of us have had that our own understanding develops in interaction with others (cf. Huff, 1999).

The idea that teaching and research are separate intellectual domains is a mistaken notion, based more on Western cultural reactions to the disciplines of modern industrialized societies than on any actual way ideas develop. Although we all still need to reconcile our humanity to the rigid discipline required by modern societies, this particular dichotomy of research versus teaching limits our understanding of how our ideas evolve and so impedes any possible attempts to better understand our fractured field. I claim that in practice our interaction with our students matters to our intellectual development. I hope to illustrate the interplay between our field's intellectual development and teaching by arguing that the intellectual diversity in management scholarship is as much caused by who we teach, and the settings for that teaching, as it is by journal editors and university tenure committees. In this way, I hope to bring the role of our teaching into our ongoing conversations about our scholarship.

TEACHING MANAGEMENT TO EXPERIENCED MANAGERS

During the past few decades, MBA programs have experienced great competitive pressures. Now, MBA students' tuition money and alumni and philanthropists' donations all play an increasing role in business schools' budgets, whether at state or private universities (AACSB International, 2002). Furthermore, all business schools feel the heavy pressure of the business school rankings produced by popular periodicals (AACSB International, 2005). For example, these periodicals rank schools by students' GMAT scores, so most business schools now offer fellowships to those students with the highest scores. Schools are ranked by graduates' starting salaries, so students are admitted

based on their likelihood of being placed in the higher-paying consulting and financial services jobs, abandoning students who want to work in government or for nonprofits (AACSB International, 2005). Furthermore, applicants who have been admitted to more than one MBA program choose the highest ranked school more than 90% of the time (AACSB International, 2005). Each school dean has a mandate to improve the school's rankings, and because schools are all ranked on a known handful of measures, all try to admit the same students, try to hire the same faculty, and try to poach one another's placement office staff to improve their rankings (Gore, Steven, & Bailey, 1998; Policano, 2005).

Among other costs, these competitive pressures have had a fracturing effect on what is taught in our management courses. The teaching of MBA students under severe rankings pressures drives us into ever smaller and more isolated conversations. Our colleagues in the other social sciences face the same university and publication institutional structures we do, but we are alone in teaching adults who have been practicing what we teach in university settings intensely competing against one another. This argument is based on the effects of four features of our teaching that, taken as a whole, foster our increasingly fractured scholarly visage.

Students Have Already Been Doing What We Teach

First, rankings pressures have driven schools to admit more experienced students. The periodicals conducting the rankings consider graduates' starting salaries a key measure of school "output quality" in their rankings (AACSB International, 2005). This creates pressures to admit increasingly experienced students to the full-time MBA programs because their better work experience (and their higher salaries) before entering the program mean that they can command higher salaries at graduation. Furthermore, more experienced students are admitted to "executive" and "part-time" MBA programs because the fees they (or their employers) pay are necessary to fund the increasing level of services needed to compete in the rankings.

Experienced students will have substantial experience doing what it is we are teaching them—management. Licensed public accountants waive their introductory accounting classes, and those with undergraduate majors in economics waive their

economics courses. However, experienced managers still take management classes in MBA programs. This places unique performance pressures on management teachers: They must successfully teach their students a subject the students have been professionally practicing. Students in law schools are not practicing lawyers, and those who enroll in medical schools have not been working as physicians. But experienced MBA students, especially those in executive and part-time MBA programs, have been doing what it is we purport to teach them. This poses a challenge for management instructors, one that is especially difficult for new faculty members, who can find themselves teaching students with substantially more practical subject-matter knowledge than many have themselves.

Student Satisfaction Is Very Important

Second, business schools are highly dependent on keeping these experienced students happy because they depend on them for rankings and the tuition to fund the school (AACSB International, 2005). Those comfortable days of arrogant, other-worldly professors teaching from yellowed lecture notes are gone, at least in business schools teaching experienced managers. Student satisfaction ratings are used by several periodicals in their business school rankings. Particularly for the part-time and executive MBA programs that have a regional focus, word of mouth is very important to "filling the next class." Donors love to meet with the students at "their school" and will certainly relay any complaints they receive to the dean. Because revenue from students and donors is now so important to business schools, student satisfaction with their courses is important to deans and senior faculty members (who know the sources of money for their travel budgets and summer support). So for their own survival, those teaching management must find a way to teach these experienced students something they will find useful, or at least enjoyable.

Academic Freedom

We teach these students in universities that are ancient, highly institutionalized systems. Most important for this argument is the tradition of academic freedom. Academic freedom means that it is the faculty who decide what gets taught. Some schools attempt to centrally direct readings or instructional approaches, but in all American Association of

University Professors–approved universities, once in the classroom, the instructor is in charge of course content. At nearly all universities, individual faculty members have formal control over the content of what is taught in their classes. As long as what they teach bears some resemblance to the small, 25-word catalogue course description, they are free to select what is taught. Of course, the real academic freedom of those teaching without tenure can be limited. However, as long as students are quiet and the course syllabus does not solely consist of popular periodical and newspaper clippings, the normative expectations for academic freedom mean that few will interfere with what other teachers teach.

I am the last person to argue against academic freedom, but when combined with the above pressures of experienced students who must, at all costs, be kept happy with their courses and the lack of institutionalized information about what should be taught in management classes, fractionized course content in management is the result.

No Institutionalized Understanding of What Should Be Taught

Finally, what should be taught in management classes is ambiguous. There are many, many different topics within the field, drawing on differing social science disciplines and practice domains. For example, how much human resources management material should be covered in an organizational behavior class? In accounting, economics, and finance, there are well-accepted conventions for what should be covered in an introductory course. Even for human resources management, the Society for Human Resources Management has produced model syllabi for different human resources management courses (see www.shrm.org). There is no such guidance for management courses.

One way consensus can be created is through the socialization of those training for careers in teaching (Van Maanen, 1976). In preparing for the profession, new recruits learn what good professionals should teach in introductory courses. However, those teaching management in our MBA programs have graduate degrees in fields as diverse as industrial-organizational psychology, work and organizations sociology, human resources management, industrial relations, social psychology, organizational behavior, organizational theory, public administration, strategy, and occasionally

even management. And this ignores the vast army of adjunct lecturers teaching management with degrees in engineering, chemistry, or philosophy and work experience in every service and industry. There is no socialization-based consensus about what should be taught in required MBA management courses because there is no common socialization for management teachers. Management teachers all come with differing cognitive frameworks of relevant management scholarship, differing practical experiences of management, and so differing ideas about what MBA students should know about management.

Management is not the only subject matter with instructors of varied training and experiences. Yet the way this challenge is usually addressed in other fields is through the use of one or a few accepted introductory textbooks. For example, marketing teachers have Kotler and Keller (2005). However, there are no dominating textbooks used in required MBA management courses. A study conducted by the *Academy of Management Learning and Education Journal's* first editor, Roy Lewicki (personal communication, August 2004), found that 80% of the 50 highest-ranked MBA programs did not use textbooks for their required MBA courses in management.

Surely, this absence of standard textbooks is an unusual situation for any required introductory course outside the humanities. I suggest that this is again the result of a subject matter-experienced student body who must be kept satisfied. Textbook publishers all pursue the largest volume markets, and there are many more business undergraduates than MBA students. So management textbooks are filled with color, Dilbert cartoons, and photographs of attractive young people. However, an experienced manager wants something more than endless bulleted lists that do not address their own practical problems. Textbooks in management do not address experienced managers' problems because they are written for teenagers, not for experienced managers. This is why so many management teachers have abandoned textbooks for instructor-compiled collections of readings. This practice probably produces better management courses for experienced managers, but it also contributes to our fractured visage.

So varied management teachers are left to their own devices to figure out what to teach to their MBA students and how to successfully do it. Of course, we hope that new faculty would receive assistance from their senior colleagues, but the quality of that will

vary. What if the senior faculty member was trained in human resources management and the junior faculty member came from sociology? Much of what the senior colleague advises will seem alien. And how many senior faculty simply forward their most recent syllabus and say, "Call me if you have a question," before dashing back to their own busy workload?

FRACTURED CONVERSATIONS, FRACTURED VISAGE

As a field, we are particularly fractured and seem to be becoming more fractured over time (Glick et al., in press). Is the fault really that our field happens to have such egalitarian and diversity-conscious elites? Certainly, any time spent with sociologists and psychologists will demonstrate that management scholars are not more politically correct than our colleagues in other social sciences. What is different about us are the students we teach and the institutional settings in which we teach them. The absence of standard textbooks used in MBA management classes and the diverse socialization of management teachers suggest diverse classroom conversations about management. Shouldn't all of this at least suggest that we take the effects of teaching seriously as a reason for our fractured visage?

Most of the people with whom we discuss ideas are our students. We need to organize and articulate our thoughts with particular people in mind. Teaching is more than just an activity isolated from our intellectual work, done to pay the rent; it is how we spend most of our time thinking about management. With student satisfaction so highly valued, management teachers need to work hard to make their classes interesting and useful. There is certainly nothing wrong with that. However, they approach that challenge with little guidance from their profession. They are forced to learn what their students consider to be their own important problems and struggle with little help in addressing those practical management problems. Because their own socialization is so diverse, they will search in different places. Because they are left to their own devices, they will develop idiosyncratic solutions. Is it any surprise that, with so much of their intellectual life involved in private conversations with their experienced students, the research problems they think are interesting will also be idiosyncratic?

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Pfeffer's (1993) article sparked such heated conversations about our fractured intellectual visage because he painfully detailed its costs. Glick et al. (in press) provided even more agonizing evidence that our junior colleagues bear a morally unacceptable burden from this state of our field. These authors have convinced me that we have a responsibility to those struggling to build successful careers in management scholarship to begin to address the fractured visage. If this argument about the role of our teaching on our fractured scholarship is credible, it suggests two courses of action.

First, although our circumstances may have put these dysfunctional processes into motion, our aversion to talking about the content of what we teach is certainly not helping. A lack of conversation about how MBA teaching influences and is influenced by our intellectual work exacerbates the problem. All too often sessions at professional meetings on teaching are devoted to tips on case discussions, exercises, and learning styles. Although these teaching-process suggestions certainly can be helpful, they are rather peripheral to the central questions of what is taught and why. For example, we could benefit from an open discussion of the best way to organize the extensive research on the validity of the selection interview to assist hiring managers who are going to conduct interviews of applicants. In addition, we know a lot about the advantages and disadvantages of goal setting, merit pay, virtual teams, and the exercise of influence, but how other management teachers convey that information to experienced managers, or if they even do, is a mystery to me. So we can begin by spending more time sharing what we say about topics that are attractive and engaging to experienced managers in the classroom.

Second, we need to acknowledge that compilations of course readings contribute to our fractured visage. At present, compilations are necessary because management textbooks that work for novice undergraduates will not be successful with experienced managers. Although the large textbook publishers have heavy operating expenses to cover and so need to focus only on textbooks with the biggest markets, there is no reason why smaller, more scholarly publishers cannot produce books for experienced managers. This kind of book is not simply claiming a conventionally organized textbook is intended for experienced managers,

but it is one that draws on research to address the problems experienced managers face. We produce excellent practical books for doctoral students studying to become professors (Frost & Taylor, 1996; Huff, 1999); there is no reason we cannot draw on our collective decades of experience in teaching practicing managers to do the same for them.² Beginning this conversation about what we teach experienced managers and why is a good place to start to address our fractured intellectual visage.

CONCLUSION

There have been too many laments that teaching is the low-status drudgery of academic life and deserves more respect. However, it is my experience that the best way to gain respect is to earn it. I hope that by noting what I believe are the direct and powerful effects of our teaching on our scholarship of management, I have shown that our teaching matters. If we want to see more respect for teaching, it is probably not best done by telling people who and what they should respect. Rather, I hope I have helped to show that our teaching affects how we think and understand management. Teaching deserves respect not because it is a worthy service to other people; it deserves respect for the powerful, unacknowledged ways it makes us who we are.

NOTES

1. The Greek original is ascribed to Aristotle.
2. I have put my time where her mouth is by writing an organizational behavior book for MBA courses that applies research to managers' own practical problems (Pearce, 2006).

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