



## Editorial

# The Spirit of Science and Socially Responsible Scholarship

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### INTRODUCTION

This editorial essay begins with two disclaimers. First, the title may imply that it is a philosophy of science essay. It is not, because I have no qualification as a philosopher of science. This is a very practical problem that I have heard, witnessed, and lived for the past twenty years. I wish to join this conversation and put in writing the issues that we cannot afford to ignore. The more we talk and write about it, the more attention it will get. Change begins from public recognition of a serious problem. And with enough attention, it may eventually reach the tipping point (Gladwell, 2002; Rynes, 2007a). Second, the issue that I am about to discuss is not new. It has been around for many years. Beginning with Don Hambrick (1994), many presidents of the Academy of Management (Cummings, 2007; DeNisi 2010; Hitt, 1998; Rousseau, 2006; Van de Ven, 2002; Walsh, 2011, just to name a few), the largest association of management scholars, have dwelled on the same issue – that our research is not serving the needs of practicing managers.

In the past twenty years, this problem has not abated and is reaching a worldwide scale. I choose to discuss this issue in this final editorial essay in my role as the founding editor-in-chief of *Management and Organization Review* (MOR) because it is of the utmost importance to our core identity, mission, and long-term sustainability as a profession. In other words, I wish to contribute to an ongoing discourse about the state of our profession and fuel a social movement about what we must do to live up to our professional responsibilities and ideals.

In the following pages, I first briefly explain the current condition of our profession, especially in the activity of scientific inquiry, followed by a discussion of how we are failing the spirit of science that underlies our scholarly mission. Finally, I offer the idea of socially responsible scholarship with three priorities to steer our research to be what it should be: contribution to both scholarship and practice.

## THE DOMINANT RESEARCH CULTURE

The problem of separation of research, teaching, and impact has been observed in more than just the management profession in business schools. It is pervasive throughout universities, as Boyer implicates in the 1990 book *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate*. Boyer charged that professors of higher education were becoming insulated from those they study, those they teach, and those whose practice or life can be improved through new knowledge. Professors were truly shutting themselves in their ivory towers. Boyer called for engagement with stakeholders in our research, teaching, and service, and for directing the work of the professor 'toward larger, more humane ends' (Boyer, 1996: 20). Since it seems that this disengagement is prevalent throughout the university, I use the management discipline (which I am familiar with) as a case in point to discuss this issue.

### **Our Research, Not Only Irrelevant but Sometimes Harmful**

Hambrick (1994: 11) titled his presidential speech 'What if the Academy actually mattered?' and asked the question of whether the world of management would be any different if the Academy of Management never existed. He went on to make a case that 'things might have worked out very, very well without us' (1994: 11). In the ensuing years, many Academy presidents continued to raise this relevance question along with a plea for change. For example, Rousseau (2006: 267) called for the Academy to 'put greater emphasis on learning how to translate research findings into solutions'. DeNisi (2010: 196) said we must 'do a better job of connecting our research to the world around us'. At the same time, many scholars have written about the research–practice gap (Rynes, 2007a; Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001; Rynes & Shapiro, 2005). Some even claim that business schools harm society by failing to produce the right kinds of students (Kantor, 2013; Khurana, 2010; Podolny, 2009) or the right kinds of theories (Ghoshal, 2005; Pfeffer, 2005; Rynes, 2007b). Researchers use theories without critically analyzing the accuracy of the theory's basic premises and its relevance to the problem being studied. These criticisms have converged on a common concern – that research has changed its focus and primary goal from producing knowledge to publishing papers, from improving practice to advancing the researcher's own career. The end result is that our research may be not only irrelevant to practice but also irrelevant to knowledge. I make this claim because of the questionable research practices and homogenization tendency caused by a bean-counting performance evaluation culture prevalent among business schools.

### **Bean-counting Performance Evaluation**

Walsh (2011: 217) used the term 'audit culture' to refer to the preponderance of ratings and rankings of business schools around the world. Walsh reacted to this with

mixed feelings. He said, 'I am thrilled. I would much rather that people care and scrutinize us than not care and ignore us'. But he went on to say, 'The problem is that we have reproduced and internalized this audit culture in our own universities. I fear for our future if that culture is left unchecked'. Under this 'bean counting' culture, where numbers more than impact can be easily counted, schools focus on only those metrics that will improve school rankings. The promotion and tenure review committees delegate quality assessment to the top journals known for their rigorous screening of research articles. Hence, only research published in specific journals – the *Financial Times* list or the school's own journal list – count in promotion and tenure evaluations (Adler & Harzing, 2009). It is foolish or even suicidal to publish books since they do not matter in reward allocation. When a distinguished senior scholar was asked why he did not summarize his life's work in a book, he said, 'If I don't write for our top journals, I might as well be writing a letter to my mother'! (Walsh, 2011: 218). Big research ideas are divided into smaller pieces to maximize the number of papers published. The research enterprise or university becomes a paper generation factory with 'Young scholars worry(ing) about surviving publication pressures and meeting promotion and tenure requirements, and many face repeated rejections from journals (Glick, Miller, & Cardinal, 2007). The academic life, instead of being the pursuit of intellectual dreams, is actually a relentless paper production machine' (Tsui, 2013: 168). Albert Einstein reminded us, 'An academic career in which a person is forced to produce scientific writings in great amounts creates a danger of intellectual superficiality' (Isaacson, 2008: 79). However, the unintended consequences of this bean counting culture in business schools go beyond intellectual superficiality. Focus on quantity as defined by number of papers rather than on the intrinsic value of knowledge may lead to questionable research practices.

### **Questionable Research Practices**

Bedeian, Taylor, and Miller (2010) reported sobering survey results regarding infraction of research ethics due to the 'win at all cost' culture. They surveyed 384 tenured and nontenured faculty and found that a majority reported having observed colleagues (perhaps including themselves?) participating in one or more shady practices such as selective reporting of results, using others' ideas without credit, dropping observations to improve statistical results, and even fabricating data or results. These practices have been observed beyond business schools, in both the natural and social sciences (De Vries, Anderson, & Martinson, 2006). In an article titled 'Scientists Behaving Badly', Martinson, Anderson, and De Vries (2005) argued that scientists should look beyond falsification, fabrication, and plagiarism to a wider range of questionable research practices that may threaten the integrity of science. For example, Walsh (2011) analyzed the number of authors in the papers published in the top five journals from 1980 to 2010. He found that an increasing number

of papers have more and more authors on them (see Walsh, 2011: 220, fig. 5). Collaboration is a good thing but there is information to suggest that not all authors listed make meaningful contributions to the article. For example, Bedeian et al. (2010: 720) reported the existence of 'article publication communes' (putting each other's names on publications without necessarily making a substantive contribution) to maximize their total number of publications. Such (mis)behaviour damages not only the reputation of science but also its intrinsic value.

I am not suggesting that everyone is unethical. Most of the scholars in our field are conscientious and ethical. However, even good people may engage in ethical infraction given the right conditions. Research has shown that individuals' moral awareness declines when their self-control resources are depleted, due to factors such as lack of sleep (Barnes, Schaubroeck, Huth, & Ghumman, 2011) or cognitive overload (Gino, Schweitzer, Mead, & Ariely, 2011). High stress levels may cause otherwise ethical people to act in ways that have unclear ethical implications. Certainly, excellent research studies are being published and scientific advances are abundant in all disciplines. The questionable research practices, however, are more than random occurrences or rare events. They are wasted resources and, more seriously, they produce misleading or even potentially harmful results. This unintended consequence is not all that surprising. Faculty members are responding to the requirements of the measurement system. When only the number of papers in certain outlets count, rational and good people will do whatever it takes to meet the expectations.

### **Homogenization of Scholarship**

This dominant research culture of focusing on a set of 'top' journals and competing for the top ranks of the most productive research schools has become a worldwide movement enthusiastically adopted by business schools in Europe and Asia (Leung, 2007; Tsui, 2007) and even countries in South America (Rodrigues, Gonzalez Duarte, & de Padua Carrieri, 2012). Many European and Asian business schools have adopted a journal list that is comprised mostly of American journals. Many schools offer handsome financial rewards for faculty publications in these journals. Since most top journals are based in North America, particularly in the United States, international scholars adapt their research approach to meet the expectations and preferences of the North American editors and reviewers. These practices in part led to the homogenization of scholarship toward the North American model that March (2005) observed.

A recent review of articles published in the six leading management journals (*Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Organization Science*, and *Strategic Management Journal*) using Chinese samples confirms this trend (Jia, You, & Du, 2012). Only ten of the 259 articles in those six journals contributed new knowledge about

management in the Chinese context. More than 95 percent of the articles examined topics and utilized theories that are popular in the literature, often having nothing to do with China. Readers may not even know that the study took place in China if the paper did not mention the location of the sample.

Beyond catering to the preferences of reviewers, even by the most experienced international scholars, there are two additional possible reasons for this homogenization condition. The first is that new young authors are learning research skills through imitation of published work in these journals. The second is that the papers, although initially focused on local conditions and theories, might be moulded to look like mainstream studies as they progressed through the review process. I can provide an example to illustrate how the process might evolve. A leading management journal was considering a manuscript in which the author used a Confucian idea to explain why Chinese business leaders felt stronger social responsibility toward their community later in life. One reviewer wrote that the Confucian perspective is not social science research. The reviewer asked the author to consider the career stage theory available in the Western literature, which is a reasonable suggestion. A new author who lacks confidence may accept this suggestion. Through this process, the paper may become a standard career study and lose the Chinese characteristics. I am not suggesting that the reviewer is wrong or that the Confucian idea is better than the career stages model. I simply offer this example to explain one possible reason why so few Chinese studies published in the top journals inform us about Chinese management practices. Most international authors work hard to ensure that their local, non-American sample is not a liability, rather than treating it as an asset in the study. Surely there is value in replicating studies in different contexts to produce generalizable knowledge (Tsang & Kwan, 1999). To achieve this worthwhile intellectual objective would require transparency on the sample location and characteristics. Recently, some scholars have argued for the value of 'indigenous' research to discover and document diverse management practices around the world and to identify both context-specific and universal theories of management (Barney & Zhang, 2009; Leung, 2012; Li, Leung, Chen, & Luo, 2012; Tsui, 2004).

This example of Chinese management research may illustrate a larger trend that many scholars have discussed (Leung, 2007; Rodrigues et al., 2012; White, 2002). Such practices again confirm that the motivation for research is more about seeking publications and less about solving important problems in immediate contexts. Using the number of articles as a criterion for resource allocation is pervasive, from the university level down to the individual faculty level, from North America to Europe and Asia. The researchers' decision to fit their research approach to the prevailing model of top journals is a rational response to a measurement system supporting the dominant 'bean-counting' research culture on a worldwide scale. As Kerr (1975) explained in a well-known article, 'Rewarding A while hoping for B', faculty members are loyally responding to the university's measurement system.

## THE SPIRIT OF SCIENCE ON OUR SACRED SCHOLARLY JOURNEY

I began my career believing, as most students did and many still do, that a doctoral education is to learn the scientific way of solving puzzles in the domain of our study. I recall many exciting discussions with professors and fellow students on the classic books in research design and methodology: *The Conduct of Inquiry* (Kaplan, 1964), *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (Kuhn, 1996, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition), and *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (Popper, 1968, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), among many others. My professors shared their passion for research and emphasized the importance of a connection to practice in scientific inquiry. I decided to pursue doctoral education because I wanted to provide better professional support to managers in the company that I was working for. I intended to return to that company after graduation, but I fell in love with research and decided to pursue an academic career. My decision was shaped by this naïve thought: ‘I can help only a few companies if I work in industry. If I work in the university, there is the potential of helping many companies (to be better companies for employees and society) through my research and teaching’. Later, I learned that this thought was not that naïve after all when I came upon this quote by Eienstein. He said, ‘Concern for making life better for ordinary humans must be the chief objective of science. Never forget this when you are pondering over your diagrams and equations!’ (Isaacson, 2008: 374). In fact, this desire to make a difference is still alive among some young scholars, as expressed in a survey of 200 new student participants at the 2009 AoM meeting (Walsh, 2011). Almost 40 percent reported ‘life of the mind’ and another 40 percent ‘serving others’ as major reasons for choosing to be a scholar. Of course, I would have liked to see 100 percent of them check intellectual pursuit (life of the mind) and service to society to be the primary reasons.

### What is ‘Science’ in the Spirit of Science?

The word ‘science’ has its origin in the Latin *scientia*, meaning *knowledge*. Science *creates* and *organizes* knowledge about the natural and social worlds. It is knowledge resulting from scientific studies evaluating hypotheses based on theories to solve puzzling phenomena that cannot be explained by folk wisdom, the existing stock of knowledge, or common sense. Through systematic, controlled, and rigorous observation or experimentation, scientists accumulate knowledge about a phenomenon. Research results that pass the rigorous screening of the scientific community through double-blind reviews are held to be acceptable until new evidence or new knowledge provides a more convincing explanation. The theory–evidence dualism defines the normal science research paradigm (Benton & Craib, 2011) practiced in both the natural and social sciences, and is responsible for the great scientific advances of the last five centuries.<sup>[1]</sup>

## The Goal of Science

Understanding the spirit of science also requires understanding the goal of science, which is to 'seek truth'. Of course, owing to the evasive nature of reality, no scientist can reach absolute truth. As we know, from philosophy of science discourse, there is more than one view of reality (Benton & Craib, 2011). The problem of the potential existence of multiple realities (e.g., the distinction between objective and subjective reality) is not only of interest to social scientists. It is also a matter of intense debate among physical scientists, as evidenced by the famous debate between Einstein and Bohr regarding the existence of matter (Kumar, 2008) or the debate between Leibniz and Newton regarding absolute space (Okasha, 2002).<sup>[2]</sup>

Both debates are about the nature of reality and indicate the scientists' quest for truth. Whatever view we accept, the purpose of science is to approximate truth as much as possible through convincing logic and rigorous empirical methods. The ultimate purpose of seeking truth is to provide valid explanations about empirical phenomena with the potential possibility of predicting and controlling such phenomena to make improvements in the natural and social worlds. In other words, seeking truth and improving the human condition are two defining elements of the spirit of science, serving as a guiding light on the sacred journey of scholarship (Walsh, 2011). Most scholars, when asked, would not disagree with this noble vision of our profession. Yet, how often do we keep these ideals in mind when we choose problems to study, methods to use, and approaches for communicating our findings (some of which may require a medium beyond that of a 40-page journal article)?

## Autonomy of Inquiry

The spirit of science involves a third element: an understanding and an expectation of autonomy of inquiry (Kaplan, 1964). We pursue science by following our intrinsic interests and judgement regarding important questions to study, and not the expectations or pressures of a higher authority or the desires of granting agencies (Tsui, 2009). On 18 July 2011, the *New York Times Global Edition* reported an infringement on the autonomy of scientific inquiry (Guttenplan, 2011). A bank gave 12 million euros to two German universities to support research on the development of financial instruments. According to the 'secret' contract, the bank would have a say in the hiring of endowed professors, in selecting appropriate research topics, in reviewing the results produced, and in withholding permission for publication. After the information became public, one university president acknowledged that in any future contracts the independence of science must be protected.

Using the number of publications in certain journals as criteria for promotion and tenure may interfere with the spirit of science. As Einstein said, 'The development of science and of the creative activities of the spirit requires a freedom that consists in the independence of thought from the restrictions of authoritarian and social prejudice' (Isaacson, 2008: 550). The lack of independence not only inter-

feres with our freedom to choose what we want to study, but also restricts our freedom to choose what we do not want to do or study.

Along the same lines, our current measurement system also reduces the autonomy of inquiry. People focus on measured activities or pre-defined ways of doing their work, often forgetting the real purpose of these activities in the process (Kerr, 1975). Journal publication is only one way to disseminate research results. Many of the most important works throughout the history of any science have been disseminated through a variety of means, including books, monographs, conference presentations, working papers, and now open source online websites. Fortunately, there are many business schools (e.g., Harvard, Stanford, Wharton, or Northwestern in the U.S., and McGill or University of Toronto in Canada, just to name a few based on my limited knowledge) that do not focus on journal publications alone, giving faculty freedom to pursue their true passions. I provide two examples of scholars who have felt free to choose both the topic and the medium to share their work. Adam Grant, the youngest full professor at Wharton, is the author of a new book, *Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success* (Grant, 2013), which is a *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* bestseller and is being translated into more than two dozen languages. Hans Hansen, an associate professor at Texas Tech University, focuses on studying death penalty defense teams to try to ensure that death row inmates receive a fair trial. Prior to Hansen's research, over 90 percent of convicted defendants received the death penalty. Hansen was able to help defense lawyers construct alternative narratives in telling the stories of the accused. These teams of lawyers succeeded in defending 34 of the 35 cases that Hansen studied, saving 34 lives. Hansen was able to combine the study of teams with social justice and compassion (Adler & Hansen, 2012). This is scholarship with a true impact on humanity. Many scholars in our field have followed their hearts in studying important problems and focusing on the impact of their scholarship on society. But this should be the norm, rather than the exception, if we are to be true to the spirit of science.

Working under extremely high performance pressure in the strong 'bean-counting' culture with no university or professional peer expectations that the research will positively impact society, highly intelligent and otherwise ethical scholars lose their autonomy of inquiry and spirit of science. What should we do about this problem? Let me suggest socially responsible scholarship as a possible escape from this conundrum.

### **SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE SCHOLARSHIP<sup>[3]</sup>**

Business schools, as places for higher learning, have an extraordinarily important social mission in society (Khurana, 2010). Whether a school has teaching as its primary mission, or research and teaching are a joint mission, its faculty members are the major producers, carriers, and disseminators of knowledge about organi-

zations and management. Business schools as social institutions must be true to their mission of offering the highest quality education and producing highly credible research that enlightens practice by addressing the most critical management problems of the time (Simon, 1976). Directing research toward improving school ranking and influencing promotion and tenure decisions without considering whether the research is relevant to practice is no better than corporations and their managers improving the organization's wealth to benefit only shareholders and themselves. Condoning or engaging in questionable research practices is not only socially irresponsible, it is morally wrong. I do not mean to appear self-righteous. I simply join many concerned colleagues (e.g., DeNisi, 2010; Ghoshal, 2005; Hambrick, 1994; Hitt, 1998; Mintzberg, 2005; Rousseau, 2006; Rynes, 2007a, 2007b; Walsh, 2011) in encouraging us to be self-reflective and self-critical. I share their concerns about the credibility and long-term sustainability of our research enterprise if we do nothing to bring the train back on track. I call on both leadership and faculty of business schools to engage in a self-audit of faculty research practices and to develop a culture that nurtures a strong spirit of science. I encourage a movement toward socially responsible scholarship.

I consider socially responsible scholarship to consist of three priorities. First, develop management models that balance the interests of shareholders and other stakeholders, and devote equal attention to studying organizations' social outcomes and economic outcomes. Scholarship that helps firms maximize shareholder returns at the expense of other stakeholders is not socially responsible (Tsui, 2013). Second, use research to truly explain management puzzles by applying systematic, critical, and controlled analysis of important phenomena in the scholars' immediate contexts and by developing meaningful theories for explaining puzzling local phenomena. Scholarship that aims to fill literature gaps and to produce the greatest number of papers rather than to offer *contextually meaningful knowledge* is not socially responsible (Bedeian et al., 2010; Walsh, 2011). Third, seek truth above all other considerations by engaging the literature and the research participants as ethically as possible. Do not compromise in ensuring the highest quality data, the most rigorous methods, and the utmost respect for and protection of the research participants. Scholarship that uses questionable research practices and treats study participants merely as instruments of research is not socially responsible (Schminke & Ambrose, 2011; Tsui & Galaskiewicz, 2011; Wright, 2011).

### **From Present Value to Shareholders to Net Value to Society**

Students in business schools are still taught that a manager's major role, if not sole responsibility, is to maximize shareholder returns. Friedman (1970) even claimed that it is socially irresponsible for a firm to engage in social activities that do not contribute to firm profitability. Ghoshal (2005) challenged this view by reminding us that shareholders are not the legal owners of the company. There is no basis

to support the claim that shareholders should be favoured in the distribution of residual wealth over other contributors. Furthermore, employees and managers who determine the strategic direction of a company and engage in production functions more often determine a firm's success in the competitive market than do financial resources. Why should shareholders, who are diffused and distant from the actual operation of the company, be given higher priority than employees and managers who contribute their talents and energy daily to the company? Socially responsible research can study the nature and consequences – in terms of economic, social, and innovative outcomes – of alternative models of ownership, including private, public, employee, and customer or even government. What type of outcome is likely to be maximized in firms with different types of ownership? What are the trade-offs for society as a whole when one type of ownership dominates?

Research has shown that scholars have focused primarily on developing and testing models of performance at both the firm and individual levels of analysis and has been minimally interested in studying social outcomes of the firm (Tsui & Jia, 2013; Walsh, Weber, & Margolis, 2003). The *Academy of Management Journal* (*AMJ*) was founded in 1958 with the objective of publishing research that fostered both the economic and social objectives of an industrial society. Curious about whether management research has achieved this objective, Walsh et al. (2003) analyzed the 1,738 empirical articles published in *AMJ* from 1958 to 2000. The result was disappointing: 'scholarship in our field has pursued society's economic objectives much more than it has its social ones' (Walsh et al., 2003: 859).

My colleague and I (Tsui & Jia, 2013) were curious as to whether the same trend would characterize management research in China. As a socialist country and a new research context, we expected that management research in China would be less constrained by tradition or established institutional norms and would show more variance in the types of outcomes being studied. Using the methodology employed in the Walsh et al. (2003) study, we analyzed 312 articles that involved Chinese samples published in the six leading management journals (*AMJ*, *ASQ*, *JAP*, *JIBS*, *OrgSci*, and *SMJ*) from 1985 to 2012. We further analyzed 134 articles published in *MOR* from 2005 to 2012, and an additional 2,388 articles published in the three leading Chinese journals from 1983 to 2012. The results are astonishing. The emphasis on economic outcomes not only dominates; it is even stronger in the Chinese journals. Across both organizational and individual levels, 94 percent of the studies in the Chinese journals focus on economic outcomes, compared with 82 percent in the six English-language journals, and 69 percent in *MOR*. In that article (Tsui & Jia, 2013), we called for more research on humanistic management that values stakeholders such as customers, employees, suppliers, or the communities supporting the firm to counter-balance the excessive focus on performance outcomes that emphasizes advancing the corporation's economic wealth (hence shareholders) often at the expense of other stakeholders.

Socially responsible scholarship might consider developing a new model of business that serves the common good by holding organizations accountable for not treating natural resources entirely as a public good. It has been estimated that the services provided by natural capital as annual subsidies to business are worth tens of trillions of dollars (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins, 1999; Tercek & Adams, 2013). Consider this story:

When a Philippine fisherman tosses a stick of dynamite into the coral reefs, harvesting stunned fish for local markets and broken pieces of coral for the pharmaceutical industry, he pockets cash at market prices. He does not pay for the loss of the coral reef, but it should be obvious that the net present value of the coral reef habitat as a future home of fish far outweighs the few pesos garnered by its destruction. Nevertheless, governments from developed and developing nations still use accounting methods that register the fish and coral harvest as net gains rather than net losses. (Hawken et al., 1999: Kindle version, location 3302)

Currently, company accounting systems do not consider the costs of using natural resources such as forests, fisheries, oil fields, grazing lands, or rivers and lakes in the commons. Companies have low-cost or even free access to these natural resources. Further, when converting natural resources to raw materials along the production chain, they produce waste that could amount to many times the price of the product at each stage (Hawken et al., 1999). Most of the solid waste accumulates in landfills and the depleted resource pools will never be replenished. Socially responsible scholarship should propose and test new models of business that account for the natural resources used and destroyed as well as the values created.

Natural resources also include human beings: employees and citizens. Working conditions are a major contributor to stress with costs estimated to be more than US\$3 billion in 2012 (Tsui, 2013). Employers bear a portion of the cost in the form of insurance premiums and lost work, but employees bear the major costs, some indirect, in terms of damaged mental or physical health, misery, and shortened life spans. In extreme cases companies may pay fines for polluting the environment such as water or air, or injuring people, but usually citizens' tax dollars pay for environmental cleanup and medical costs. Shouldn't these expenses be factored into the company's production costs? Socially responsible scholarship can identify and test models that use net value to society rather than present value to shareholders in defining organizational performance or effectiveness.

Lest you are beginning to feel discouraged, do not despair because there is hope in sight. Value to society in both teaching and research is the major priority of a new model of management education proposed in a book published jointly through an international collaboration by leaders in the Globally Responsible

Initiative, the World Business School Council for Sustainable Business, and the United Nations-backed Principles of Responsible Management Education. Known as the 50 + 20 initiative, it outlines an ambitious agenda for changing management education from being the best IN the world to being the best FOR the world, hence the book's title: *Management Education for the World* (Muff, Dyllick, Drewell, North, Shrivastava, & Haertle, 2013). This new management education model aims to develop globally responsible leaders, and to encourage business leaders and faculty scholars to focus their work primarily on serving society. Under this new model, faculty will serve as public intellectuals and institutional role models with strong engagement with the beneficiaries of their teaching and research. This will require 'new reward, recognition and promotion systems for faculty to shift current narrow subject focus in research and teaching to future-oriented, broader issue-based research serving the common good' (Muff et al., 2013: 147).

### **From Paper-motivated Research to Context-sensitive Scholarship**

As individual researchers, we can begin to steer the course by going beyond the 'literature' and focusing on the problems around us. In drawing research ideas and inspiration, we can step out of the paper world and into the practice world. Our work and life contexts are full of important problems that deserve scientific attention. While we may be tempted to take the less risky approach by filling the gap mentioned in research papers or adding one or two variables to a well-studied research model, it is difficult to justify the importance of this type of research. Unsurprisingly, papers with literature-motivated ideas often generate this reaction among reviewers: 'Why should we care about this problem? Why is it important?'

The book *The Tacit Dimension* (Polanyi, 1966) reminds us that truth is contextual. We should begin with an understanding that we know more than we can tell. In other words, every theory has its tacit contextual assumptions. Theories developed in one context may or may not be suitable to explain a similar phenomenon in another context (Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007). For example, agency theory is based on an assumption of self-interest. Although self-interest-motivated competitive behaviour might be acceptable in cultural contexts high in individualism, the assumption of self-interest may not describe the psychological tendencies of people in cultures that emphasize cooperation and where group interests dominate individual concerns.

Theory development follows three stages. In the first stage, a researcher notices a puzzling phenomenon. For example, Staw (1981) observed that the U.S. government was sending more and more soldiers into combat despite clear signs of failing in the war, and companies had a tendency to invest more and more money into failing projects. He could not think of any rational theory to explain why governments or companies persisted in these failing courses of action. The second stage is the development of a logic or theory to explain this phenomenon. In Staw's

(1981) case, he used the self-justification idea to develop a theory of escalation of commitment to explain the puzzling behaviour he observed. The third stage consists of testing, retesting, refining, and modifying the theory. Brockner (1992) and Staw (1997) described the development and update of this theory. Most of the existing theories of management were developed by theorists to understand and explain interesting phenomena that they observed occurring in their surroundings. The 1950s to the 1980s were exciting times for management research and theory development (Smith & Hitt, 2005). However, development of new ideas and new theories has stalled in the past twenty years, the same period during which scholars began to observe the increasing irrelevance of our scholarship.

In a review of international business research since the founding of the *Journal of International Business Studies* in 1970, Buckley (2002) found that in the earlier years research focused on 'big questions' about 'empirical developments in the world economy' (2002: 370). However, '(t)he agenda is stalled because no such big question has currently been identified' (Buckley, 2002: 370). While the opportunity to frame big questions may diminish in a mature context such as the U.S., new contexts in emerging economies, such as China, India, Russia, Africa, or Eastern Europe, are not lacking interesting or important management problems. They can offer opportunities for novel, big, and different questions to revitalize the intellectual stagnation (Tsui, 2007).

Attention to context reflects the spirit of science since the purpose of context-sensitive research is to address important phenomena in the local context and to develop contextually meaningful theories. Consequently, socially responsible scholarship requires critical evaluation of the tacit contextual assumptions of theories borrowed from another context. Both evaluation of the suitability of existing theories and the development of new contextualized theories require deep knowledge of the context's history, culture, and legal and economic institutions (Johns, 2006; Rousseau & Fried, 2001; Tsui, 2006, 2007). Context-sensitive research will ensure that a contextualized theory will yield knowledge that matches the reality of the people and organizations in that context. This enhances the possibility of generating knowledge that approximates truth in that context, and improves the relevance of the knowledge for potential practice.

### **Socially Responsible Scholarship through Stakeholder Engagement**

Responding to the call for engaged scholarship (Boyer, 1990), Van de Ven (2007) provides a framework to implement a participative form of research in organizational and social research. The researcher seeks key stakeholders' perspectives, such as other researchers, sponsors, clients, and practitioners. Researchers engage other researchers through literature reviews, conference presentations, and informal seminars at home institutions or at other universities. Current research practice, however, falls short of engaging practitioners (Rynes, 2007a) and research

participants (Wright, 2011). How many of us, for example, present our ideas to managers before we finalize the design? If we did, how many managers would understand what we are talking about? I suspect most would stare at us with glazed eyes. Is this surprising since we derive our questions from papers rather than from observing the world of practice? Socially responsible scholarship involves asking important questions and finding true answers. Both require meaningful engagement with our research participants.

Engaged scholarship means that we understand the world of managers and employees in order to learn about pressing problems they cannot solve. Some of their problems may have answers in the literature. Those that don't would become the target of our inquiry and would open a new line of research. Development of the escalation of commitment idea (Staw, 1981) is a good example of phenomenon-driven research. The research on the employee–organization relationship by my colleagues and me (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997) is also an example of a phenomenon-motivated research project. Although we did not talk with many managers, we learned of the problem through the media (television, newspapers, and business magazines), which reported an interesting and puzzling paradox: companies were firing employees while demanding extra commitment from them.

Engaging with the external world can open our eyes to potentially important and big questions that the recent literature misses. When we have a research question that is meaningful to employees and managers, and they can see the value in the study and in the potential relevance of the results, we will likely find it easier to secure their interest in participation. Having a meaningful research question or topic is the first step toward gaining the respect and trust of companies and the people we intend to study. Trust can be further enhanced if we spend time in the company to become intimately familiar with the people and the phenomenon we are analyzing. Once the people are familiar with us and trust us, we can observe more genuine behaviour and gather more truthful data.

Engaged scholarship means that we think about how our research can benefit our research participants as much as how it can benefit us, both in terms of outcomes and during the study process. Wright (2011) urged us to treat our research participants as valued stakeholders. Instead of treating the participants as cases, subjects, or numbers in our dataset, remember that they are real people with minds and hearts, and often with challenges and concerns about their employment. Wright told about a work–stress research involving a participant who consistently had very high diastolic blood pressure readings. Wright encouraged the participant to seek the advice of his personal physician who put him on medication immediately, possibly preventing an impending heart attack. In another study on emotional exhaustion, a participant extended the 'how often' to 10 on a 0 to 6 scale. He wrote 'expletive deleted', and on another item, he wrote 'dead, alert' and 'extremely, extremely . . . angry' (Wright, 2011: 498). Wright learned about those

responses only when he found out about the tragic suicide of the distressed participant a few days later. These examples are sober reminders that we need to have compassion toward those we ask to participate in our surveys. How often, or do we ever, remember that they are real people rather than simply instruments for our research studies? How often do we genuinely thank them for giving us their time and valuable information?

Do we ever ask why managers and employees should help us with our research when our purpose is to write papers that meet our own needs? Why should granting agencies give us financial resources to conduct research that leads to our promotions and employment security? What entitles us to use public goods for our private gains? True scientific discovery is priceless. We should spare no resources to find cures for cancer and other deadly diseases, to understand our atmosphere and environment to improve the chances for the future survival of our human and other species. When we aim our research at solving pressing problems in the world of work – at individual, team, organizational, industry, national, or international levels – we should expect support from granting agencies and those whom we study. Science has a noble purpose of discovering truth and improving the human condition. When we approach our research with this spirit, our scholarship will naturally be socially responsible.

## A ROLE FOR EVERYONE

We each can contribute to improving the spirit of science in our profession. Young scholars can choose to study important problems and not be limited to inspiration from the literature. Senior scholars can be role models, encouraging and supporting young colleagues to be true scientists. Doctoral program curriculum should include a course on philosophy of science and research ethics.<sup>[4]</sup> Those in leadership positions can design or revise the institution's evaluation criteria to support research with a real social impact on society and to eliminate the unintended consequences of a measurement system that focuses exclusively on number of articles in a defined set of journals. They should ensure that the academic institution's sacred mission is free from the influence or contamination of commercial ranking activities. Journal editors can place practical relevance and impact as a desirable criterion in determining the overall contribution of the manuscripts.<sup>[5]</sup> *Management and Organization Review* aspires to be both rigorous and relevant by publishing research that reveals unique or universal management practices and organizational designs in China and other emerging economic contexts. Collectively the management research community can rejuvenate the spirit of science, create valid and relevant knowledge, influence practice, and improve the wellbeing of all stakeholders in the organizations and the research enterprise. With our commitment, we can live up to the challenge of ensuring that our scholarship will serve 'the nation and the world' (Boyer, 1996: 17).

## CONCLUSION

I may not have said anything you do not already know, but important messages are worth repeating, and I firmly believe that we all want to be the scientists we know we can be. Guided by this spirit, there is no doubt that we can make a difference in the world of practice through our scientific inquiry. As scholars, we are truly blessed with being in the best position to make a difference in our societies through our research and teaching. In closing, allow me to share a quote a friend sent me after she heard my talk based on this essay.<sup>[6]</sup> Like her, I was inspired in knowing that the yearning for making the world a better place transcends time and space.

I spend all my time going about trying to persuade you, young and old, to make your first and chief concern not for your bodies or for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls, proclaiming as I go, ‘wealth does not bring goodness, but goodness brings wealth and every other blessing, both to the individual and to the state’. (From Plato’s ‘Apology’, 29d3-30a7, in Plato, 1993: 53)

## NOTES

I express my sincere appreciation to many colleagues who have inspired me to think about these issues in recent years. I owe them for providing the intellectual roots of what I have tried to share in this essay. Deep appreciation also goes to many colleagues and students in China. Some of them listened to this message multiple times. My thanks also go to PP Fu, Joe Galaskiewicz, Kwok Leung, Arie Lewin, Sara Rynes, and my daughter Amelia Tsui for comments on earlier versions of this essay. Their intellectual and moral support sustain me.

- [1] Modern science is said to begin in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) who was known as the ‘father of modern science’. His major contributions, among many, include combining mathematics and experiments in the study of physics, astronomy, and technology.
- [2] Einstein’s view is that molecules exist independent of our observation or experience, but Bohr considered it impossible to regard objects governed by quantum mechanics as having intrinsic properties independent of determination with a measuring device (Kumar, 2008). Newton proposed that absolute space exists independent of the elements (planets or other materials) within them. Leibniz argued that space consists of all the material objects in relation to each other. Without these objects, there is no space. To Newton, the concept of absolute space is necessary to determine absolute versus relative motion. Leibniz argued that absolute space is not observable (Okasha, 2002).
- [3] The 2010–12 co-presidents of the International Association for Chinese Management Research, Jia Lin Xie and Jing Zhou, gave their presidential speech titled ‘Scholar’s social responsibility’ at the 2012 biennial conference in Hong Kong. Their talk inspired me to use the term ‘socially responsible scholarship’. The text of their speech is available in the *IACMR Newsletter*, Fall 2012: <http://www.iacmr.org/v2en/Publications/Newsletter/12issue3/DetailPic.asp?id=271>.
- [4] The Management Department of the W.P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University just introduced a required course for its doctoral students on Research Ethics. The course instructor Professor Joan Brett is happy to share her syllabus with anyone interested. Please contact her through the Management Department.
- [5] The new editor Gerry George of the *Academy of Management Journal* has added “Relevance for practice” as one criterion in evaluating the manuscript during the review process.
- [6] I thank the colleagues and students from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Lingnan University, Peking University, and Zhejiang University for their endurance and feedback during the seminars in which I shared some of the ideas in this essay. These seminars were given during the months of September and October 2013. I thank PP Fu of the Chinese University of Hong Kong for sharing Plato’s inspiring quote with me.

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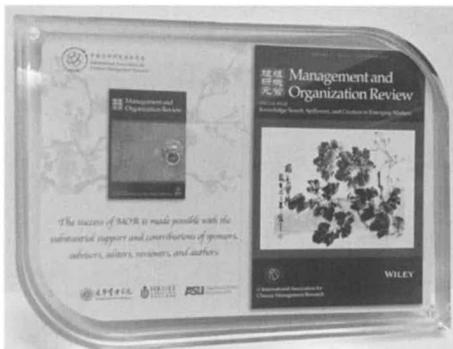
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## A SPECIAL NOTE OF APPRECIATION

From Anne S. Tsui, Founding Editor-in-Chief

There are many people to thank for the successful launch of *Management and Organization Review* (MOR) in 2005 and its development over the past ten years. The founding editorial, advisory, and review boards were formed in 2003 and MOR began accepting submissions later that same year. The first issue of Volume 1 (March 2005) was published almost a year ahead of schedule to coincide with the IACMR inaugural conference in June 2004. To all who have played a role in MOR's founding and its growth in the past ten years, I offer you my sincerest gratitude. Your contributions are ingrained in the history of Chinese management research. I also thank Arie Y. Lewin for his endorsement of MOR's potential by taking on the editorship. I am confident that with his wealth of experience, creative leadership, and spirit of dedication, along with the collective energy of his editorial, advisory, and review boards, MOR will reach new heights in the years to come. A unique feature of MOR is the artwork displayed on the cover and interspersed inside the issue. Below are the covers of the 27 issues under the founding editorship. I hope you will agree that the content is as beautiful as its covers. It has been my greatest privilege and deepest honor to have served as the Founding Editor-in-Chief for a journal that fills an important space in the organization and management knowledge domain.



## A NOTE ABOUT THE COVER ARTWORK

Mr. Junsheng Liu is the artist of the cover artwork, a traditional Chinese painting of the Mudan (peony). This painting tries to show joyous moments, auspiciousness, enthusiasm, and prosperity. People can see a contrast from color and space between the flowers and leaves, while at the same time there is a feeling of harmony; and that is the secret of Chinese beauty. Due to its rich beauty, 'Mudan' (peony) has earned the unofficial title of the 'national flower of China'.

Mr. Liu specializes in landscapes, birds, and flowers. His work focuses on the combination of nature, spirit, and human expectations, which often show a deep meaning in simple lines. He is a member of the Chinese Association for Traditional Landscape Painting, and Beijing Association for Traditional Flower Painting. Mr. Liu's paintings are displayed in several galleries.