

FROM THE EDITORS

Critical Management Studies and the *Academy of Management Journal*: Challenge and Counterchallenge

The Academy of Management members who are active in our organization's Critical Management Studies (CMS) Interest Group, self-dubbed the "critters," stoked my current interest in their viewpoint and activities when I stumbled into a session at the 2002 Academy meeting, "Critical Management Studies." I discovered a group of highly dedicated members who were requesting, and on the verge of obtaining, interest group status in the Academy. The CMS people first materialized formally as a preconference workshop at the 1998 Academy meeting. At that workshop, members interested in critical approaches to management research met to discuss their mutual research interests and to plan their development as a group with a separate—but cross-cutting—identity within the Academy. Having fast risen to interest group status, they will undoubtedly soon request to be recognized as a division.

Who Are the Critters?

The thoughts and feelings expressed orally by those in attendance at last year's session suggest the group comprised many disgruntled members who think the Academy runs a dull, one-sided show that takes an uncritical—almost unthinking—promanagement stand. They stressed their call for "critical" research and writing to get management scholars to question their assumptions and to analyze whose interests they are promoting with their research, at whose expense. Their agenda for a critical approach to management research includes positions on feminism, sexism, and ageism, but it goes far beyond these. The critters seem to strongly echo sociology's traditionally critical approach.

British accents (Australian and New Zealandese were also well represented) seemed overrepresented if not prevalent in that session. Indeed, according to the current Academy of Management Web site, the Critical Management Studies Interest Group's membership is 43 percent "international"; by comparison, the BPS and OB Divisions have 34 and 28 percent international members, respectively. Many of those present at the 2002 "Critical Management Studies" session seemed to be expressing a collective persecution complex. They

seemed to think that "the powers that be" in the Academy of Management sought to shut them up or shut them out, for fear of alienating those upon whom those powers depend for continued support of their university chairs, their lucrative consultancies, and their academic research opportunities.

Lest anyone unfamiliar with the people involved in CMS be tempted to dismiss them as a group of crackpots at the margin, that is not the case. The people involved in this group included some of the most highly visible and respected scholars in the Academy: Paul Adler, David Boje, Charles Booth, Peter Frost, John Jermier, Walter Nord, Linda Smircich, and Ralph Stablein, and many other fine scholars with whose work I am less familiar.

Upon realizing what kind of a group I had strayed into, I thought, "Here I am, Mr. Mainstream, associate editor of *Academy of Management Journal*, in a hotbed of dissent, sedition, and insurrection. What am I doing here?" But my second thought was that what I was hearing was interesting, if not fascinating, that it made a lot of sense, and that these are Academy members with a minority viewpoint that ought to be heard. I also suspect that there is far wider sympathy, albeit largely tacit, for many of their positions in the wider Academy of Management community than the critters might imagine. Is their upgrade from a workshop to interest group status a case of establishment cooptation? Perhaps, but there can be little doubt that the critters will have significant impact on mainstream Academy values, thinking, and action.

The CMS Agenda

When they say "critical," these people mean business. They correctly dub their approach "radical"; the word is derived from the Latin *radix*, which means root. It is appropriate because the critters seek to go deep in their quest to expose, understand, and change the underlying causes of managerial and organizational phenomena that others study more superficially. For example, the Critical Management Studies Interest Group domain states:

Our premise is that structural features of contemporary society, such as the profit imperative, patriar-

chy, racial inequality, and ecological irresponsibility often turn organizations into instruments of domination and exploitation. Driven by a shared desire to change this situation, we aim in our research, teaching, and practice to develop critical interpretations of management and society and to generate radical alternatives. Our critique seeks to connect the practical shortcomings in management and individual managers to the demands of a socially divisive and ecologically destructive system within which managers work.

Terms like “structural features of contemporary society” and “a socially divisive and ecologically destructive system” exude the sociological flavor of their approach. Their scope is as wide as it gets: it goes beyond individuals, groups, and even organizations to encompass the whole of society. Moreover, their declared aim is not limited to unlocking Nature’s secrets, but to generating change that will result in a societal system that better accords with their values. That is, their agenda is as much, if not more, politically driven than scientifically motivated. Clearly, one way to achieve these ends is to reform or radicalize the Academy of Management, or parts of it, and use it as an instrument of change. This process is currently underway.

This year the Critical Management Studies Interest Group is sponsoring (jointly with the Management Education Division) the second “Dark Side” Case-Writing Competition. The call for submissions on the Critical Management Studies Web site (<http://aom.pace.edu.cms>) says that the competition is “designed to acknowledge cases that address the dark side of contemporary capitalism.” The call also states:

This competition therefore aims to encourage the development of cases that provoke reflection and debate on the “dark side” of contemporary capitalism. Some might argue that we are promoting “muckraking.” They are correct: we feel that if there’s so much “muck” out there, it behooves us to look at it squarely and decide what should be done about it. For both teaching and research purposes, it is critical that we have well documented worst-practices cases on the table, so that we have the opportunity to understand how such organizations come into being, how they function, and how they might be challenged and changed.

A Personal Reaction

The issues that the CMS Interest Group addresses are vital but easily ignored, overlooked, and downgraded. As a doctoral student studying organizational psychology at the University of Michigan in the mid-1960s, I was taken with *The Servants of Power*, by historian Loren Baritz (1960). It was rich

with persuasive examples of how the captains of industry, through donation-greased arrangements with leading academic institutions, had early on harnessed industrial psychology to help managers induce workers into working harder and more efficiently to endow owners and managers with disproportionate financial benefits. Throughout the years, there has been an endless flow of treatises highlighting the manipulative and exploitative side of the Hawthorne studies, accusing those early pioneers of teaching management how to milk hapless workers for greater profit. Recently, Brief (2000) affirmed that many of the troubling issues raised in Baritz’s treatise are still with us. Similarly, many will also remember Blau and Scott’s (1962) thought-provoking typology of organizations based on the question, *Cui bono?*

At the time, I shared with many other students the rebelliousness of youthful tyros entering the profession, an alienation from established norms, and a strong urge to effect change in the established order of things. Eventually, the road to tenure and adult socialization eroded these youthful dreams as I settled into the conventional rut of “publish or perish.” Unintentionally, imperceptively, and ever so gradually, I internalized the profession’s dominant norms as formulated by those faceless “powers that be.” Only recently have I been coming around more and more to the realization that we editors and associate editors *are* these “powers.”

The critical issues appear to have been addressed seriously only when subjected to “critical” analysis. Without that, it is ever so easy to let the entire *cui bono* question slip into the repressed netherland of our unconscious minds, where we consign things we do not want to think about as we go about the business of building our personal careers and consuming our small piece of the great industrial (capitalist?) pie. It takes a different mind-set to maintain focus on the larger issues, and sociology has traditionally done this much better than psychology. Herein resides one of the strengths of management and organizational behavior as academic disciplines: both the psychological and the sociological perspectives are available to us.

The Challenge of CMS to the Rest of Us

Whom *do* we serve? And at whose expense? Have we *AMJ* authors and editors and members of the larger Academy of Management community anything to say about the obscenely large gap between high executive salaries and the hourly wage and about the lack of relationship between corporate success and top executive salaries and benefits? (Remember Jack Welch’s multimillion-dollar

retirement package, the details of which were revealed to General Electric shareholders and to the public only in his wife's divorce suit years after the deal had been done?) Is it our responsibility to say or do anything when we learn that companies we serve by conducting their management research garner huge profits by procuring subassemblies, raw materials, or finished products at bargain prices from overseas subcontractors or suppliers that exploit child labor, prison labor, or other disadvantaged populations? What about the manipulation of stock prices by executives to accrue greater value in stock options before they retire from a company with unfairly—and likely, illegally—obtained personal fortunes? What about the brazen accounting outrages that have recently decimated major corporations and cost countless thousands of honest, innocent investors and employees their hard-earned savings and pensions, and even their jobs? Are we to remain silent about the climate that pervades organizations and society that let this rot develop to its present stage? What did we do to prevent or retard it? What *should* we do in the future? Is it right to keep going with our “business as usual” and ignore all this?

Clearly, these questions can be answered on more than one level. While still in her role as president of the Academy of Management, Jean Bartunek (2002) raised these issues in a special presidential panel entitled “The Crisis in Corporate Confidence” at the 2002 Academy of Management meeting. This was when the rot, the corruption, and the lawlessness of too many business leaders was peaking in the public's view. The papers presented at the panel were published in “Current Issues in Management” in the *Academy of Management Executive* that same month. In that forum, Tom Kochan (2002) analyzed the lopsided emphasis on maximizing shareholder value at the expense of other corporate stakeholders as the root cause and pointed to needed reforms in labor laws to redress the imbalance. John Child (2002) revealed that these problems are international and proposed changing the *governance* of multinational corporations and strengthening the *understanding* of host country values and beliefs on the part of those who manage multinationals. The critters got their views aired in the piece authored by Paul Adler (2002), coordinator of CMS. Adler reported on the results of a discussion of the CMS group at a special session at the Academy meeting. Characteristically, their view emphasized going beyond ordinary ethical and educational considerations to analysis and change of the underlying social structural causes of these business disasters.

Finally, Denny Gioia addressed the tacit role of

business education in creating “the mess” and in helping to redress it. For him, it boils down to positive and negative self-efficacy. He concluded his remarks by saying, “The starting point for that process is a belief that we can make a difference. If we believe we can't make a difference, you can be quite certain that we won't” (Gioia, 2002: 144). The critters believe we *can*. Will we? Do we *want* to?

Another at least partial answer from an Academy of Management journal is the recent call by Art Brief and Max Bazerman in “Editors' Comments” in the *Academy of Management Review*. Citing Alvesson and Willmott's (1992) introduction to critical management studies, Brief and Bazerman (2003) called for management and organization researchers to adopt a consumer orientation. Brief and Bazerman emphasized that the field suffers from “management myopia,” that is, a dominant ideological orientation that produces research that serves management interests. They challenged management scholars “to pose questions that recognize consumer welfare as a desired goal” (2003: 189).

The Academy of Management Code of Ethical Conduct

The Academy of Management Code of Ethical Conduct, which appears regularly in Academy publications (it is in every December issue of *AMJ* and on the AOM's Web site) and is morally binding on us all, also addresses some of these issues. The Code is perforce terse, as codes of professional conduct tend to be. It calls our attention to “the needs of the poor and disadvantaged,” reiterates our responsibility to consider “the perspectives of those who are the least advantaged,” and prescribes “listening to those whose welfare is affected.” There is no operational definition of “listening.” The Code states appreciably more concerning our obligations to our students and to our research participants than to the disadvantaged whose welfare our research affects. What then *is* our obligation to the latter? The Code is important for well-known reasons that there is no need to enumerate here. However, the critters undoubtedly can provide more of an answer to this question than does the Code.

President Bartunek brought the critical challenge to the Academy meeting; our sister journals the *Academy of Management Executive* and *Academy of Management Review* have brought it to the attention of their readership; and the Code of Ethical Conduct makes its statement. Where does that leave the *Academy of Management Journal*? What is this publication's role in understanding the issues and contributing to their solution?

Our Challenge to the Critters

AMJ is in the business of publishing the best available theoretically driven empirical research on management. Our role is not to compete with *Academy of Management Executive* or to duplicate other consciousness- and conscience-raising efforts. Neither is it our role to involve the *Journal* in advancing the political program that CMS has put on the Academy of Management's agenda. Rather, our role in promoting openness to the issues that CMS has tabled is to encourage first-rate research into these issues and to publish the best of it. The "critical studies people" complain that the mainstream establishment hides behind rigid and exclusionary rules of evidence and uncompromising standards of methodology for acceptable scientific research that, in combination, shut them and their research out and perpetuate evasion of these issues. Should we relax the rules of evidence for CMS research? Should we challenge mainstream researchers to include a *cui bono* statement with their submissions to *AMJ*? Should we initiate a periodic column devoted to critical analysis of recent publications in *AMJ*? Should we open a periodic forum to which readers can submit proposals for how to address critical management issues in *AMJ*? Should we propose an Academy session devoted to these questions?

Working out these questions will take time. Meantime, I want to pose a counterchallenge to the critters. Now that the Academy "establishment" has taken the bold step of legitimating CMS by granting it interest group status, the next step should be a spate of top-quality, theory-based research articles submitted to *AMJ* using current methods in the field. Critical scholars should be able to get across many of their points while playing the research game by its methodological rules. I am not suggesting that these research submissions *replace* other activities in which the critters engage to promote their ideas and goals within the Academy; it is their prerogative as an interest group to pursue their agenda in many ways. I am proposing a more serious entry into the scientific research arena as an *additional* way of gaining recognition for their cause. If it is legitimate to use *AMJ* as an outlet for scientific research that can serve to increase profits through improved management, it should be as legitimate to use it as an outlet for improved management that serves other aims.

We are the custodians of a journal dedicated to publishing the best science regardless of the uses to which it is put. It can be and often is used to disseminate knowledge about ways to maximize ROI to the benefit of owners and investors; it could

be used to illuminate the "socially divisive and ecologically destructive system within which managers work" and how to remedy it. The fact that there has been much more of the former than of the latter is not the result of editorial policy; rather, it reflects submissions. So long as little or no theoretically driven, innovative, and methodologically sound critical management research is submitted, that is how much will be published.

It is undoubtedly true that *AMJ* is a hard nut for the critters to crack. But *AMJ* is hard for *everybody* to crack. Some critters claim it is because we hide behind rules that discriminate against their critical methods to protect ourselves by screening out their message. After much soul-searching, I am convinced that our editors and reviewers hold everybody to the same rules and view critical research with open minds. The countercharge is for the critters to stop using the demands of positivism as an excuse and start doing the kind of research that gets published. A sign of *AMJ*'s methodological breadth and openness is that our editor, Tom Lee, has published a book on qualitative research methods (Lee, 1999). Even if the rules do discriminate against critical research, the challenge is for the critters to find ways to beat the system using its own rules. I think they are up to the challenge. However, accepting and meeting that challenge will be more difficult than assembling annually to complain about it. Beyond methodology, it may also require development of novel critical theories that are amenable to empirical testing.

There are several indications of CMS's apparent willingness to meet this challenge, as well as one sign of CMS's growing acceptance among mainstream Academy members. For example, there are the upcoming joint events that the CMS Interest Group is cosponsoring with long-established divisions at the Academy of Management at the 2003 meeting in Seattle. By the time this column has been published, the CMS Interest Group will have conducted a professional development workshop, "Crafting Qualitative Fieldwork," which was cosponsored by the Research Methods and Organizational and Management Theory Divisions, and a session entitled "Pursuing Critical and Ethical Agendas in Organizational Research," cosponsored by the Research Methods Division. It doesn't get more mainstream than that. Not incidentally, these events were announced via the Research Methods Division's electronic RMNet, whose subscribers are among the field's most methodologically meticulous researchers. These joint activities are signs of mutual respect and embrace.

Thus, a process of mutual influence is underway. The resulting cross-fertilization is bound to benefit all

AOM participants and constituents. CMS is advancing its agenda to influence the larger Academy of Management community, and it is bound to be influenced in the process. When the latter leg of the reciprocal influence spiral is actualized, we can expect to see publication in *AMJ* of outstanding management research, undertaken from a critical perspective, using the methods that other researchers who publish their work here use. I for one would be very pleased to see that happen. It would enrich our field with the too-long neglected critical perspective without sacrificing theoretical and methodological rigor and *AMJ*'s standards of excellence. I believe we are ready for this.

Are the critters up to the challenge?

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