The Ambiguous Enterprise of Management: A Collaborative Future?

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Abstract

There are significant ambiguities surrounding the academic discipline of management, which can be analysed in terms of three major debates. First the professional status of management brings with it questions about restriction or access to management education, the control of curricular and the relative importance of basic, applied and consultancy-driven research. Second, there are debates about the changing nature of management research, which require the accomodation of increasing diversity within management theory. Finally, the ambiguities associated with these debates can be seen to have impacted on the development of management education, its accessibility and diversity. The ambiguities associated with these debates must be carefully managed if the discipline is to prosper. New organisational forms are needed to embed management teaching and research within the complex collaborative relationships of the many stakeholders involved.

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Cynthia Hardy and Gill Palmer

Management, as a set of practices an academic discipline and a program of study, is notoriously difficult to define (Higher Education Council 1996, Australian Research Council 1997). The term 'management' ~~itself~~ has a variety of meanings and is used to denote an academic discipline, an occupational group, a hierarchical status or elite, as well as a ubiquitous social process. Changes in management research and practice during the last thirty years have led to still greater diversity in its theoretical underpinnings, methodological orientations and practical applications. Accordingly, the study and practice of management is beset by ongoing debate and contradictory tensions that, in turn, produce ambiguity about the place of management departments in relation to stakeholders inside and outside the university. In this paper, these debates are explored with a view to suggesting ways in which the discipline might position itself in relation to its internal and external constituencies. We suggest there is more to be gained by opening up management to these diverse influences and opinions than in shutting it off from them (Hardy & Palmer, 2000). Rather than advocate that management should be purged of diversity and debate, we argue that administrators, policy makers, researchers and other stakeholders need to find ways to accommodate and support management as an ambiguous enterprise.

This paper reviews the sources and nature of ambiguity in management. It does so, first, by discussing the debates associated with management as a professional practice. It then explains developments in research and theory to show how management has emerged as a diverse, pluralistic and transdisciplinary field of study. The paper then discusses how debates concerning professional practice and research have shaped the evolution of management education. This analysis helps to reveal the ambiguity that results from the complex relationships that enmesh management as an academic discipline. Finally, the important role of collaboration in accommodating and supporting these relationships is discussed.

Management: Profession and Practice

Management shares with medicine, law, engineering and education the status of a practice-oriented profession, rather than being a purely academic discipline. This status of professional practice contributes to the ambiguity of management as an academic enterprise by producing debates about whether access to training and jobs should be extended or restricted, internal and external accreditation, and the relative value of applied and basic management research.

Professional Access: Restrictive or Expansive?

The ancient professions of law and medicine developed in feudal times when, faced with demands for professional standards, skilled occupational groups developed their own training and accrediting structures and gained political support for systems of accreditation that were primarily within the occupation's control. Occupational accreditation endorsed the trained 'masters' and enabled the occupational craft or profession to increase its control over its labour markets by restricting entry to the occupation. The newer professions have found it much harder to establish and maintain the use of self-accreditation to restrict entry and to control professional standards because they developed in a context of countervailing pressures from state-funded education and stronger government administration. Nevertheless, the newer professions still attempt to influence access to jobs by advocating professional standards and training.

In management, accountants and lawyers maintain strong elements of occupational control, as CPA and Law Society accreditation requires occupationally approved curricula and professional practice. In the more general management area, no occupational association has been able to establish such an institutionalised influence over training for jobs. However, the historical development of the MBA has been influenced by professional ideas of restricted entry. Professional ideology underpins the traditional view of the MBA as a form of accreditation, which should be taken only after a first degree and several years of senior management experience (Ralph Report 1982, p. 4 para 10). This view undoubtedly seeks to restrict access to the management profession in a manner that is reminiscent of the craft and professional strategies used to control access to privileged jobs.

More recently, challenges to this exclusionary approach have emerged. Management is seen as a ubiquitous social process that requires the widest possible access to education and learning. The argument for extending access was expressed in the Cyert Report (1970, pp. 20 & 26) in Australia and the Porter & McGibbin Report (1988) in the United States, and has become much more insistent in recent times. Changes in organisational structures and management practices that involve and 'empower' employees have weakened support for definitions of management as an elite preoccupation and added support to the view of management as a broadly based process of social control. For example, Drucker (1999a; 1999b) emphasized the importance of self-management for the knowledge workers of the late twentieth and twenty-first century. In the new millennium, the old assumptions that organisations outlive workers and that most people remain in their jobs will prove untrue. Instead, organisations will evolve, change, disappear and reappear in response to environmental and strategic pressures. Consequently, management education will need to develop self-management and entrepreneurial skills that are appropriate for an increasingly individualised society, rather than retain its traditional focus on organization-based leadership.

Professional Controls: Internal or External?

Closely associated with notions of professional status is the debate about who exercises control over the educational curriculum—the occupation, the universities or external stakeholder groups? Bok (1986: 78-9) found external stakeholders are more likely to raise questions of accountability, accreditation, professional standards and ethics in management than are academics or students. There is an ongoing debate about the desire of universities and

occupational groups to police their own academic initiatives and the demands of external stakeholders for accountability, relevance and, sometimes, conscience from educators.

The scope, growth and diversity of management have inhibited the establishment of uniform standards by groups like the Australian Institute of Management or the Australian Human Resources Institute. The oldest and strongest attempt to establish standards has been by AACSB's (American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business) accreditation of business programmes. This practice has not spread to other countries, however, and many leading North American universities eschew accreditation, ironically, as a sign of quality. However, other stakeholders outside universities and management occupational groups are implementing new forms of external control over university courses. For example, publishing houses publish rankings of courses and universities in *The Australian*, as well as in *US News* and *The World Report* in the United States, *Macleans* in Canada and even *Playgirl* in Brazil (Hardy 1990). Individual institutions are faced with a dilemma in deciding whether to participate in these surveys. Inclusion provides legitimacy and attracts students, while self-imposed exclusion raises questions of the reason for the decision. Consequently, despite protestations of the numerous 'problems' with such surveys, most universities participate. Meanwhile, performance indicators like the RAE (research assessment exercise) in the United Kingdom demand compliance—and the attendant work involved—in order to secure funding and to meet regulatory requirements.

Research: Applied, Basic or Transdisciplinary?

A third debate, stemming from the professional and practitioner communities that surround management, relates to the competing pressures for basic and applied research. There has always been a demand for practically relevant research and the recent Australian Research Council Disciplinary review of management research in Australia (Australian Research Council 1997) found business and government leaders wanted applied research in areas such as managing domestic and international business alliances, diversity and innovation. However, in addition to immediately applicable, practically-relevant research, there is a significant—but often unmet—demand for basic and strategic research that takes a longer-term perspective on fundamental issues and which provides a more critical appraisal of management processes and practices than is possible in industry-supported research. One attempt to resolve the debate between applied and basic research has been the argument for 'transdisciplinary' research, where new forms of knowledge production transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries and represent more than the sum of different disciplinary approaches (Gibbons et al. 1994, Australian Research Council 1997: 61–66, Hoff, keynote address at BAM 1999). Gibbons et al. (1994) contrasted the traditional development of scientific disciplines with new methods of developing knowledge through application. Practitioners apply their knowledge to new problems and contexts and, in the process, develop a multi-disciplinary, interdisciplinary understanding that does not easily reduce back to the original academic disciplines. Thus, transdisciplinary research informs application and contributes to more fundamental knowledge.

The debate between basic and applied research also draws attention to the ambiguous relationship between academics and the growing management consultancy industry. The relationship can be close, for applied research often fuses the two, and strong personal and institutional links between the two industries are common. However, the differences are also

important. While consultancy organisations provide a great deal of applied research for their customers and the larger consulting firms sometimes invest in more long-term and comparative research, it is the universities that recruit, train and employ researchers with the skills and time to engage in long-term, fundamental research. The consultancy industry must sell its management expertise in the demanding and highly competitive, corporate practitioner market. One response to this pressure has been the development of a 'fashion' industry, constantly stimulating the market with 'new' ideas, packaged around management 'gurus' (Huczynski, 1993) and the promise of miracle cures. The demand for advice and guidance is so strong, so new, and often so desperate, that the ability to distinguish between charlatanism and genuine value is difficult (Micklethwait & Wooldridge 1996: 370–4). Under these circumstances, it is important that forms of theorizing can differentiate themselves from the management practices they sustain. For example, Barley et al. (1988) showed how organization theorists' accounts of culture have been progressively infiltrated by an agenda of consultancy. Given calls for research to have more influence on the professional community, it is particularly important that academics are able to engage in critical, reflexive research that explores the nature of research, the process of knowledge production, and the relationship between theory and practice at a more fundamental level (Hardy & Clegg 1997).

In summary, the analysis of the relationship between the academic enterprise of management and its professional and practitioner constituencies reveals a number of debates. Traditional professional views continue to argue for restricted access to management education, although, in many respects, this has been overtaken by the growth of management programs. Occupational and other stakeholders continue to exert an influence through informal accreditation and demands for educational programs to be 'relevant,' moves that are often strongly resisted by academics. The broader professional community also pulls research away from more fundamental issues, blurring the relationship between academe and the consulting community at a time when the latter is adapting to competitive pressures by increasing the fashionable and, some would argue, faddish (Abramson 1996) nature of its product. These debates reveal the complex and multifaceted nature of the relationships between management academics and educators and their myriad constituencies. The question is: How can the ambiguity inherent in these relationships be managed?

Management: Research and Theory

Research and theory development must lie at the centre of management as an academic enterprise, but the debates that surround the development of management theory need to be understood and managed if research is to support management practice.

Management is an academic discipline associated with the twentieth Century, even though many of the intellectual traditions on which it draws have a much longer legacy. By the 1960s, these traditions had converged around a functionalist view, which conceptualized organizations as systems designed to achieve explicit goals through rational decision-making. According to this view, a manager's task is to define and achieve organizational goals; while the researcher's task is to collect objective data about how organizations function in attempts to achieve these goals. Research follows the normal science model, emphasizing formal research design, quantitative

data, and a steady accumulation of empirically generated knowledge derived from a limited number of theoretical assumptions, associated with such disciplines as logistics and engineering, administrative science, operations management, economics and social psychology (see Clegg & Hardy, 1996). While some theoretical approaches within management continue to operate on these lines, others have emerged that directly challenge functionalism and normal science (Marsden & Townley 1996).

In organization studies, such approaches were captured in Burrell and Morgan's (1979) framework in *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*, which provoked an influential debate during the 1980s. This debate challenged the dominant orthodoxy and legitimated new approaches to the study of organizations (e.g. Aldrich 1988; Hassard 1988; 1991; Jackson & Carter 1993; Willmott 1993a; 1993b; Burrell 1996). Other writers introduced these new ideas into the wider study of management (e.g. Palmer 1988, Reed 1989, Gardner & Palmer 1992, Dawson & Palmer 1995). By the 1990s, another important theoretical development became evident as post-modernist approaches, which had gained coverage in the social sciences and humanities, started to attract increasing attention in management theory (Alvesson & Deetz 1996, Calás & Smircich 1996). The result has been heightened interest in different research approaches and the relationships between them. Thus the neat precision and dominance of normal science has been challenged with resounding success as the field embraced and incorporated new disciplines, theories, approaches and methodologies and developed an increasing tendency to integrate ideas across different sub-disciplines. Of course, this means considerably greater ambiguity than once characterized the field and, while some might view a return to the certainty of the scientific method and rational analysis with nostalgia, it would appear that ambiguity and diversity are here to stay (see Clegg & Hardy 1996).

Many other disciplines have contributed to the ever-expanding and ever-changing field of management. Sub-disciplines as diverse as marketing, human resource management, operations management, strategic management and international business, all show evidence of increasing pluralism, as they seek to address broader managerial issues, examine the organization in its wider social and historical context, and address organizations outside the business sector. What is evident is that increasing diversity and pluralism in the disciplines that constitute management have given rise to growing debates concerning about the 'best' way of carrying out management research. This, in turn, shows that the nature of management research is becoming increasingly ambiguous. Attempts to 'turn back the clock' and re-impose the earlier orthodoxy and paradigmatic certainty (e.g., Pfeffer 1993), aside from being impractical, risk losing the additional insights gained through other approaches. The question remains: How can we support diversity in research approaches in ways that continue to enrich and develop our understanding of management process?

Management: Education and Teaching

What impact have these debates about research and practice had on the content and delivery of management education? We begin with a review of the United States, often considered a leader in this field, and then turn our attention to Australia. We review the experiences of both countries to draw attention to a number of inherent debates—between elite and mass education and

between scientific precision and academic pluralism—that characterise the history of management education.

Management Education in the USA

Nodoushani & Nodoushani (1996) see the United States as the leader in management education. They divided developments in America into four phases.

The Early 19th Century: Schools of Commerce

The first foray into management education emerged in the late nineteenth century as several attempts were made to establish new schools of commerce and finance, which would be seen as academically respectable, providing an appropriate education for a young generation of prospective business people. Resistance arose from academia, which looked down on ‘trade’ schools, and from business people, who preferred education through the ‘school of hard knocks.’ Even Andrew Carnegie argued that education might offer ‘higher tastes and aims’ but little insight into business administration (Baida 1984–5). However, following some failed attempts to establish schools of commerce, the University of Pennsylvania successfully established its Wharton School in 1881. This marked the beginning of a period during which universities managed, with some difficulty, to establish academic respectability for the new fields of commerce and finance.

Between the Wars: Graduate Schools of Business

The next wave of management education evolved between the wars in response to the rise of big business and calls for the professionalization of management. Business schools adopted a more elitist position, seeing themselves as educating business leaders for the modern enterprise and the wider society. The search for academic respectability was replaced by a strategy of creating separate organizational structures for new types of degree. Separate graduate schools offered programs aimed not at undergraduates or at individuals with a first degree in management, but at managers with several years’ experience. Their training was intended to be applied and, while postgraduate in the sense that students were graduates, it was an advanced form of an undergraduate syllabus. However, the promotion of management education as an endeavour to professionalize society’s leaders contradicted the socio-economic forces of the post-world war II era. Demands for mass education and the democratisation of higher education saw management, not as an elite pursuit, but as a universal skill that could be acquired through the specialization of knowledge according to the philosophy of modern science (Nodoushani & Nodoushani 1996).

The Post-War Period: Graduate Schools of Business Administration

The explosion in higher education that occurred after the Second World War provided a major impetus for business education. Growth in the number of business students was accompanied by a burgeoning interest in behavioural science, decision-making and problem analysis. It is at this point that the functional approach to management education started to make its mark on the curriculum, being promoted by the 1959 reports by the Ford Foundation (Gordon & Howell

1959) and the Carnegie Foundation (Pierson 1959). Management education shifted towards developing analytical tools to identify, solve and implement managerial decisions, relying primarily on the behavioural sciences, positive economics, operations research, quantitative methods and the use of mathematics (Nodoushani & Nodoushani 1996). Gleeson (1997) also noted the impact of think tanks, such as the Cowles Commission and the RAND Corporation, which had been established to extend the boundaries of quantification in social science research in military and economic matters. The aim was to mix cutting-edge quantitative social science research with a professional management education to create scientifically reliable methods that would improve managerial effectiveness. By this time, management education was offered in graduate and undergraduate programs, although often with a strong professional preference for the former.

The 21st Century: Management Schools?

By the 1980s, the Business Administration approach had come under severe criticism. Cochran (1977) noted that the emphasis on behavioural science and mathematics had failed to produce a comprehensive theory of management much beyond that suggested at the turn of the century. The emphasis on data gathering, manipulations of information and personnel and problem solving was accused of producing a mechanistic worldview that was detached from purposeful action (Gharajedaghi & Ackoff 1985). Critics argued that problem solving was emphasized at the cost of problem identification, goal setting and implementation. The influential Porter-McKibbin Report found that, while business education provided graduates with strong analytical abilities, motivation and knowledge of relevant content areas, there was an overwhelming complacency among business schools. They ignored the wider social and political context, neglected issues related to managing people and integration across functional areas, and were preoccupied with the status quo, short-term concerns and conformity (Porter & McKibbin 1988).

These criticisms have pushed many American universities to revise their approach to management education. Management is no longer confined to a senior managerial elite, but has become part of many undergraduate programs. Management education is now aimed at generating scholarship that enhances our understanding of how business works and of its wider social impact. Managers and academics have come to the conclusion that successful managers need technical and socio-cultural skills and that some of these can be taught at all educational levels. Subjects from the humanities have been integrated into the management curriculum in order to explore concepts like motivation, leadership and social control, to understand the importance of emotion and to help students to develop an affinity for the experiences of others (Clemens & Myer 1987, Puffer 1991, Gilbert 1997). A third change has been a wider definition of the role of management education. Porter (1997) argues that business schools will continue to face high standards of accountability from a wider range of constituencies and need to respond to diverse stakeholders, to social and ethical concerns and to a global environment. Similarly Drucker (1987: 13) points out that educators need to recognize that there is as much management outside business as there is in business and attacks the traditional Master of *Business Administration* degree as inappropriate for the main management degree course.

As a result of these trends, many of America's 1200 business programs are reviewing theories of knowledge and pedagogical approaches (Nodoushani & Nodoushani 1996) and revisiting the

purpose of management education (Mitroff & Churchman 1992). In addition, the AACSB adopted a new approach to accreditation in 1991 that reflected these changes. Previously, accreditation involved a fixed and quantitative approach, based on standards and procedures that emphasized compliance with a set of numerical input indicators and adherence to a curricular structure composed of a specified common body of knowledge. The new system places a priority on a school clearly stating its specific mission and articulating the processes used to implement the mission and to measure how well goals are being met. It encouraged individuality, a willingness to take risks in curricular, as well as a willingness to innovate (Porter 1997).

In summary, the nature of American management education has changed radically over the years. However, regardless of the changes, American management education has not escaped debate. In its early years, the debate revolved around whether the relatively young discipline of management was a legitimate scholarly area. A second debate concerned whether to confine management education to an elite group, through an emphasis on postgraduate education and experience, or whether to make it available to students at a variety of levels. Third, there was a debate between a 'scientific' approach to management and more recent trends towards diversity, which incorporates a wider range of disciplines and approaches. In other words, over time, elitism and scientific precision have been challenged by accessibility and academic pluralism, which have rendered the nature of management education far more ambiguous, as many American business schools have revamped their curricula, changed the nature of what they teach and overhauled their organizational structures.

Management Education in Australia

The Australian history has some parallels and some differences with the American situation. Australian management education developed later. In 1963, Australia had only two MBA providers, although by 1995 this had grown to nearly forty. Today, management is probably the fastest growing sector of tertiary education. In the late 1990s it accounted for more than 20 per cent of total university student numbers. Moreover, in Victoria, enrolments for the Year 12 Business management have increased from 7,500 students in 1992 to over 12,000 in 1998 and it is one of the most popular VCE subjects (see the 1997 Management Discipline Review published by the Australian Research Council).

As Nyland (1987) and Patmore (1988) noted, the early twentieth century American view that management could be studied and taught as a science had little influence in Australia before World War II. Early developments were, instead, strongly influenced by British military ideologies and the notion that management skills—in particular 'leadership'—could not be taught through the usual tertiary education channels. Management training needed to be based on extensive experience, not on a technical, science-based management theory emerging from the United States, which many saw as threatening established managerial prerogatives by providing wider access to managerial positions and privileges (Nettle 1996).

By the 1950s, however, American ideas were beginning to take hold and quantitative techniques became an important part of management practice as government-sponsored industries employed modern technology and production methods and were later sold off to private enterprise (Nettle

1996). Military analogies and the interest in exclusive leadership waned as American ideas, which attempted to provide a rational knowledge basis for managerial authority, gained ground. Key figures in Australian companies started to push American ideas, leading to the 'Americanization' of the Australian Institute of Management in the 1960s, which regarded management as a kind of scientific expertise that could be analyzed, measured, and quantified (Nettle 1996 referring to *Management News*, May 1961 and June 1961).

In 1969, the Commonwealth Minister for Trade and Industry set up a committee of inquiry into postgraduate management education, chaired by Richard Cyert, then Dean of the Carnegie-Mellon Business School. The committee members were largely American or American-trained and their report, published in 1970, recommended the establishment the Australian Graduate School of Management (set up at the University of New South Wales in 1977) as the first Australian business school. It was designed to disperse North American ideas on management education through its MBA and PhD programs.

Support for the American-style MBA also influenced the 1982 Ralph Committee of Inquiry into Management Education, which also largely consisted of senior managers from American-controlled companies with American MBA qualifications (Nettle 1996). However, the Ralph report did not promote American ideas about mass education for managers. Instead it voiced a desire to restrict management education as an elite profession. Noting with concern the spread of undergraduate and postgraduate courses and the creation of a distance-based Masters at Deakin University, the report argued that courses should be closed and the growth in management education should be restricted—in the interests of quality. It proposed the creation of a new national graduate school at the University at Melbourne, with regional schools at Macquarie, Monash, Queensland, Adelaide and the University of Western Australia. However, the report also recommended the closure of the graduate management programs at Sydney, Deakin and Wollongong and at the NSW, Royal Melbourne, South Australian and Western Australian Institutes of Technology, as well as the generalist Master of Commerce stream at the University of New South Wales. Management education for undergraduates was to be discouraged. While the Melbourne Graduate School was founded, the other recommendations were not implemented and, despite some limits on the development of MBAs (for example at QIT), the Ralph report did not succeed in restricting the spread of management education.

In the early 1990's the Karpin Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills Inquiry was established in the context of the then Labour government's concern with improving the skills needed to support its interventionist industry policy (Nettle 1996: 103-4). At the time, there was widespread concern that business educators were out of touch; that Australian managers lacked crucial skills and that traditional MBAs downplayed leadership skills. The Karpin Report's (1995) response to these arguments was to call for the widespread expansion of management education, not only within the universities, but also within TAFE and the private sector, especially for front-line workplace managers.

This call for the democratization of management education was couched in terms of the need for more training in leadership skills. The Karpin Committee's use of the term leadership is unusual in that it does not have the conventional connotation of something separate from and 'above' managerial roles and tasks. Indeed, it is difficult to distinguish between Karpin's 'enterprising

leaders,' who operate at all levels of the work process, and the more democratic notions of management as a social process involving a wide variety of actors in a particular social group. Accordingly, there was an inherent debate between Karpin's call for the widespread development of training in leadership skills and the ideology of elite leadership, traditionally used by the 'Old Boys' network in its defence against the challenge of university-trained managers (Nettle 1996).

So, while the Karpin Report can be criticised for lacking a theoretical framework to clarify the complexity of modern management theory and practice (Lamond 1996) and relying too heavily on an economic rationalist perspective (Harding 1996), it nonetheless reflected a move away from elitism and towards diversity. Its particular emphasis on leadership also challenged the dominance of rational analysis, supporting other findings in this regard. For example, a survey prepared for the Business Council of Australia's Business-Higher Education Round Table found employers wanting staff with communication skills, an ability to learn new methods and a capacity to make decisions and solve problems. Specialized knowledge ranked relatively low among their priorities (Kavanagh 1992). Arguments have been made for a move in emphasis from finance and economics towards 'softer' organization and human resource skills, managing change, restructuring, and strategies that manage people rather than simply focusing on labour as a commodity or a cost (James 1993).

The history of management education in Australia, while different from America, reveals similar debates. In addition to the search for legitimacy for a young discipline, there has been an ongoing struggle between elite and mass education and between scientific precision and academic diversity. In many respects, the Karpin Report epitomizes these contradictory pressures. It urges the need for 'leadership'—but at all levels of the organization. It promotes the case for 'soft' management skills—but advocates the standardization and concentration of research and funding in proposals for the creation of a single national Graduate Business School, a new industry-based funding body for funding management research and a new system of accreditation for MBAs (Karpin 1995 pp. 297-357). It acknowledges that management consists of a broad range of complex behaviours—but fails to find a theoretical framework that can encompass and integrate them (e.g. Lamond 1996). The failure of Karpin's proposals may be that, having grappled with management's inherently ambiguous nature, the report attempts to remove it through a series of proposals to constrain, standardize and normalize.

Clearly, we need other strategies for addressing the ambiguous nature of management education. There can be no doubt about the growth of undergraduate, postgraduate and cross-disciplinary teaching in management. Nor can we ignore the decline of the traditional MBA market of experienced students without any previous education in management and the increasing maturity of the MBA as a product, juxtaposed against increasing interest in undergraduate management programs from domestic and overseas students. Moreover, despite suspicions in some of the more traditional universities about vocationally oriented social science, especially at undergraduate levels, and the introduction of more non-quantitative subjects, management education is evolving in complex but important ways. We cannot ignore this complexity and, in our opinion, we should not seek to eradicate it. Rather, the question remains: How should we sustain, support and legitimate the changes that help to encapsulate the inherently ambiguous nature of management education?

New Organizational Forms for Management Education and Research

We have reviewed three areas of the management ‘enterprise’— practice, research and education—and identified a number of debates that demonstrate an increasing ambiguity in the study of management. These debates revolve around contradictory views about the appropriate influence of external, professional stakeholders, a suitable approach to research, and relevant programs and structures for management education. The resulting ambiguity is further compounded when we consider the complex links between these areas, since education, practice and research influence each other.

The tendency with ambiguity is to try to stamp it out—certainty and solidity are far easier to manage than uncertainty and fluidity (Palmer & Hardy, 2000). Yet, if the academic field of management is to prosper and serve the needs of those inside and outside the academic profession, we need to consider ways to nurture this ambiguity. In the final section of this paper, we examine some of the implications of this and, in particular, how management as an ambiguous enterprise requires the creation or consolidation of new organizational forms that embed management teaching and research in a series of complex collaborative relationships.

Collaborating across the University

We need to address how management education might be organized in ways that capture and protect its inherent ambiguous nature. In the past, management has been the source of innovative organizational experiments. The earlier debates about the juggling of demands of external practitioners with a transdisciplinary education led to the creation of unique courses, delivered through separate organizational forms. Because more traditional university disciplines were not responsive to the particular needs of management, boundaries were erected between management education and these ‘normal’ university activities by placing MBAs in organizationally separated business schools, which had various degrees of financial and academic autonomy. These separate business schools cocooned management programs so that experimental initiatives could be made in the development of professional and executive training. Management was protected by being slotted into the safety of a customized ‘pigeon hole’ that differentiated it from the other compartments in the professional bureaucracy (Hardy et al. 1983), while loose coupling (Weick 1976) provided the necessary connections to the larger institution.

It is tempting to try to solve the current challenges in this field by containing ambiguity through the continual erection of barriers between management and mainstream university education and by concentrating management in a small number of dedicated organizational units. For example, the Ralph Report tried to restrict management education to one MBA provider in each state and, following the Karpin Report, attempts were made to broker a merger between the AGSM and the Melbourne Business School. There are, however, costs to a strategy of erecting formidable organizational boundaries around management education. It can inhibit research and restrict the spread of new initiatives within the larger university. A study of management research in Australia noted that the business school environment was not conducive to the development of research in management, especially the more basic and strategic kind (Australian Research

Council 1997: 44). Organisational boundaries designed to protect the development of MBAs and executive management programs have also prevented the spread of innovation in course design and delivery back to the main university and blocked intellectual developments that can come from more open, cross-disciplinary collaboration. Where separate, graduate-only Business Schools have formed after the development of undergraduate management education, the ensuing territorial conflicts have often caused major organisational dysfunctions, preventing collaboration and joint working between units responsible for management education. Separate business schools may also respond to new competitors in the maturing, global MBA market—the new ‘corporate universities’ found in America and the new forms of management education delivered by consultancy firms — by strengthening their links with particular businesses, which further divorces them from their universities.

All these factors serve to narrow management education so that new initiatives derived from research and involving other disciplinary areas become even more difficult. Accordingly, we advocate integration and strategies to encourage people to bridge the boundaries that separate university-centred from market-centred teaching and to ensure that organisational spaces are developed for management that allow it to do both.

Collaborating outside the University

Collaboration inside the university should not, however, preclude collaboration between management departments and external stakeholders. Management scholars cannot detach their educational and academic endeavours from the larger context. In addition to nurturing research within university departments, we also need to ensure that university-based research is connected to external constituencies in ways that strike a creative tension. Successful collaboration involves ensuring power is shared among partners (Hardy & Phillips 1998), which allows collaborating partners to balance their role as representatives of independent organizations—each possessing different views, traditions and interests—with their role as participants of a collaboration that seeks to overcome these differences. Collaboration—rather than domination—will help to develop agendas for applied research that are informed by fundamental research and help to avoid the pressures for “quick fixes.” In this way, we facilitate both ‘basic’ and ‘applied’ research.

There are a number of Australian Research Council (ARC) initiatives that offer considerable opportunity for this type of collaboration around management research. First, the Australian Research Council’s strategic initiatives pilot program on Management Research Networking (co-ordinated by Palmer, 1998 – 2001) will help to promote such collaboration. It brings together researchers in many universities and uses the organizational capacities of Australia’s professional associations in management education, through the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management (ANZAM), the academies for marketing (ANZMAC), industrial relations (AIRAANZ), accounting and finance (AAANZ) and employment relations (IERA). Second, the Australian Research Council policy to promote collaborative research provides ideal opportunities for collaborative, transdisciplinary research. However, organizational difficulties have been noted in studies of the ARC’s Co-operative Research Centres (CRCs). CRCs, as multifaceted, matrix-type structures, do not fit neatly into organizational structures associated with scientific disciplines, which has hindered the dissemination of knowledge. In science, for example, organizational barriers can prevent publication of research findings from CRCs through

the normal, discipline-based scholarly journals. The need to resolve such organizational limitations is great (Turpin 1997) and becomes a management project in itself. Third, the IREX (International Researcher Exchange) Scheme provides funds ‘to build strong ongoing collaborations between research groupings or centres of excellence in Australia and overseas’ and to ‘enhance existing, and develop new, collaborations’ (Australian Research Council, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, *IREX Scheme: Guidelines for Year 2000*: 4). This funding initiative can help create complex research alliances as ideas are moved around the world.

In organizing and funding management research in this way, we face the problem of nurturing and managing innovation without creating institutional rigidity. On the one hand, there are dangers in concentrating a large proportion of limited resources in centralized, quasi-permanent bodies. While economies of scale may appear attractive, concentrating resources in dedicated large research centres can produce inertia, creating a pattern of ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots.’ Management research does not require the same investment in overhead as medicine or physics and, therefore, a concentration of resources is less important than developing knowledge-based competencies. On the other hand, some co-ordination, nurturing and management of research development are essential if we are to develop a critical mass and play a role in the international academic community. This, in turn, means stimulating research in a number of key projects across Australia that are connected to each other and to researchers from across the world. Multiple, crosscutting connections are needed—to form and dissolve in a transient web of research alliances. In fact, this is the reality of conducting internationally recognized research, but more needs to be learnt about how to support and nurture such initiatives. In today’s information age and global knowledge-based economy, it is time for management research to demonstrate how such complex relationships can be managed.

Conclusions

In summary, we propose a rethinking of the organizational structures, funding arrangements, and management practices that currently house and support management education and research. As Palmer & Hardy (2000) point out, in the past, management education has tended to sweep ambiguity under the organizational carpet preferring, instead, neat explanations and clean solutions. Now it is time to accept and exploit this ambiguity in both theory and practice. In this regard, we wish to emphasize more fluid organizational forms that can handle and nurture the ambiguity that characterizes the field and create new collaborative relationships inside and outside the university.

We argue for research and teaching capabilities in management to be nurtured in ways that provide co-ordination, and support, without the disadvantages of over-institutionalization. Instead of self-contained units, we suggest academics working in management departments *connect* with people from different disciplines and departments in ways that traverse traditional university boundaries. We believe that management departments should also be *networked* to external stakeholders but in ways that allow all parties to contribute their core competencies in meaningful, balanced and differentiated ways. The proper funding of major projects that support collaborative, cross-institutional research and transdisciplinary research is a solution. In the

complex world of management teaching, territorial barriers need to be dissolved. If business and other organizations can experiment with these new organizational forms so, too, can universities.

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