

Guest Editorial



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Dear Colleague in Learning,

We are delighted to present this special issue of the *Journal*, which features the best papers from the fourteenth Irish Academy Conference which was held at the National College of Ireland, Dublin in September 2011.

The theme of the conference was 'Making a World of Difference: Nation-Building and the Role of Management Education'. This theme was not only reflective of our Jesuitical origins at NCI but was appropriate and contemporary given the changes that we have witnessed in the global economy in the last four years. We believe that the theme appeals to our own scholarship and research interests, and the conference presented an opportunity for the showcasing of the role of academic research in rebuilding and growing sustainable economies. This was an agenda with both national and international appeal. As academics, we do have a responsibility to provide and develop leadership in times of crisis through the education and development of the architects of future economic growth and success. In addition, we play a pivotal role in identifying the road which should be taken in order to guarantee a safe pathway to this growth and success.

As scholars, we often talk about our role and mission as a community of academics. Is our research 'frontier research' or is what we do applicable and relevant in addressing the types of problems we are witnessing daily in business, in industry and in organisations of all sizes? Marginson (2002) speaks about the academic identity and, in reference to his own work in Australia, about what he refers to as 'place-based identity'. He questions what it is in our identities that enables us to make a distinctive contribution to a form of global higher education that is truly underpinned by partnership between nation and university.

Tilak (2008) also talks about the shift in perception of the nature of higher education. He argues that societies are increasingly viewing higher education as a public good, as opposed to a private good. In essence, he refers to a commodity that can be traded and implies that such a change of perception is fraught with expectation and, by dint of this assertion, will have serious implications for the role of our academic community and the contributions that we make. Our challenge at the 2011 meeting was to really understand our contributions and to learn something about how our learned contributions lead to the

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creation of a better society for all. This challenge has never been more pressing, and post Celtic Tiger (Fisher, 2006) it has, for us all, been redefined by circumstances and events which are both predictable and unpredictable.

The first paper in this special issue, 'Exploring Supply Chain Collaborative Innovation: Evidence from China' by Chen, Brennan and Zeng, is very relevant to our theme. It considers innovation as a critical source of competitive advantage. It focuses specifically on supply chain aspects and argues that the supply chain itself is a kind of network structure. The paper embraces the system dynamics methodology and explores how elements internal and external to the supply chain interact with each other and contribute to collaborative technology innovation.

The second paper, by Sheerin, 'Destiny or "Choice": Women in Investment Management – Why so Few?', is highly innovative and topical. It looks at how the banking and finance sectors have traditionally been male domains, noting how in recent years women have been attempting to challenge this status quo. The author focuses on investment management and the trading floor in particular, and suggests that these stubbornly remain 'a jungle of chest-pounding males'. Using a literature-based perspective, she addresses the current gap in the literature concerning the educational choices, and subsequent career-orientated decisions, made by women, arguing that such choices influence them to opt into or out of careers in investment management. A conceptual model is presented, which identifies three key clusters of individual factors that influence educational and occupational choice. Sheerin paints a convincing picture from which we as members of an academic community have much to learn.

With respect to our own learning as a community of scholars, there is much that is commendable and relevant in the work of Larkin and Neumann in the third paper, 'Playing the Performance Management Game? Perceptions of Australian Older Academics'. The authors explore Australian older academics' perceptions of performance management. They draw on documentary data from 21 universities and interview data from 52 academics to reveal predominantly negative perceptions. They utilise the psychological contract as an interpretative framework to understand the academic employment relationship and subsequently argue that the overwhelming feelings of dissatisfaction and cynicism among older academics towards the futile use of performance management are clear signs of relational psychological contract violation, thus eroding trust and loyalty.

No academic conference with a focus on management and a theme that centres on the concept of nation-building can afford to ignore service. Paper four, by Kearney, Coughlan and Kennedy, 'An Exploration of the Effects of the Servicescape on Customer and Employee Responses in a Grocery Retail Context', provides us with an investigation of the impact of the environment on the responses of both the customer and the employee within a retail grocery setting. The authors combine and integrate the theoretical foundations of servicescape theory, and their findings (based on an online quantitative study that uses a sample of 133 customer and 61 employee questionnaires) suggest that almost 50 per cent of customer satisfaction is explained by the dimensions of service employee quality, noting that this has important implications for retail managers.

Paper five, by Cotter, in many ways summarises the essence of the current global economic crisis. 'The Case of AIB and ICI, 1985–1993: The Measurement and Disclosure of a Liability' looks at Allied Irish Banks plc (AIB) and its acquisition of the Insurance Corporation of Ireland (ICI) in 1985. It details how ICI subsequently got into difficulty and sought a substantial injection of funds, which AIB was not in a position to provide, making ICI effectively bankrupt. Cotter then details how the Irish Government agreed to purchase the ailing subsidiary for a nominal sum. The Government's intervention was perceived as preventing a financial crisis in the entire banking sector at the time. Cotter presents a detailed analysis of how AIB's accounting treatment provides evidence of a classic case of earnings management, exemplified in AIB's failure to provide for the full cost of support arrangements provided to the Government and Central Bank after the State's purchase of ICI. The paper contends that AIB's accounting treatment of its losses, following the collapse of ICI, bears a parallel to the failure of the banks to reveal the true fall in the value of their loan assets at the time of the Irish Government's bank guarantee in 2008. Cotter suggests that little has been learned from the lessons of the past, a fact that is likely to be reflected in the future regulation of the Irish banking sector.

Some would argue that the nature of global business has in the last century, and in the early decades of this one, been significantly impacted by the role of multinational companies (MNCs). Many argue that it is MNCs that have led to a global crisis that has precipitated the debate on nation-building and has challenged us as an academic community to respond. Paper six, by O'Brien, Sharkey Scott and Gibbons, 'Developing Strategy from the Middle: Subsidiary Strategy and the Role of the Subsidiary General Manager', details how the multinational subsidiary is a unique context in which to study management processes relating to strategy. It highlights how such change in global business has forced us to re-engineer our approaches to and understanding of global business. The paper suggests that subsidiaries evolve over time and, through their own actions and initiatives, have the potential to modify the power structures of the multinational enterprise. The authors review the empirical and theoretical research on subsidiary management, and their paper highlights how the tensions between the headquarters perspective and the subsidiary perspective have resulted in inappropriate frameworks being applied to the study of subsidiary managers.

The final paper, by Nash and Basini, 'Just Whose Hand Rocks the Cradle?', reflects an aspect of societal change. It aims to specifically understand the parent-child purchase request relationship from the perspective of fathers. The authors note that the majority of research that looks at this aspect of purchase behaviour is dated and tends to focus on the traditional family unit, including family interactions, communications and decision making and their impact on the parent-child purchase request relationship. This paper addresses the current gap in understanding fathers' purchase request experiences. Using an interpretivist approach in conjunction with phenomenology as a methodology, findings are presented through several emergent themes, identified through the interpretive process. Their findings position the parent-child purchase request relationship, from the

perspective of fathers, in a positive light, where understanding permeates this natural, familial interaction.

We hope that you enjoy this special issue and that it helps to reignite and sustain an important academic debate. We are especially grateful to the Council of the Irish Academy for the opportunity to have hosted the fourteenth annual conference and to let it be the academic *pièce de résistance* of our sixtieth anniversary celebrations at National College Ireland, Dublin. This issue would not have been possible without the generous support and help given by the many reviewers drawn from the wider Academy community. A special thanks is due also to Professor Dave Collings and Gwen Ryan from the editorial team for all their help and assistance.

As a final caveat, which in a sense encapsulates what we sought to do at the 2011 Academy Meeting, we remember the immortal words of Confucius: 'He who wishes to secure the good of others has already secured his own.' We believe that, as individuals and as a collective, we have made significant progress on the road to securing our own good. Let us continue that important journey and, as an academic community, evangelise that important message.

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October 2012

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