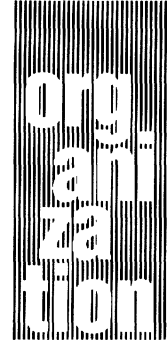


Volume 9(3): 447–452
Copyright © 2002 SAGE
(London, Thousand Oaks, CA
and New Delhi)



commentaries

In Sight, but Out of Mind:¹ Dilemmas that Diminish the Chances for Reconstructed Policy Sciences

Anne Sigismund Huff

Cranfield School of Management, UK and University of Colorado, USA

James Oran Huff

University of Colorado, USA



Mayer Zald calls for 'reconstructed policy sciences' in this issue of *Organization*. In his cosmological analogy, Critical Management Theory has been a loosely connected sub-discipline revolving around the relatively low-status suns of organization behaviour, organization theory and to some extent strategic management. If its orbit were to change, it might alter the trajectories of its sheltering disciplines and make a difference in the study of business as a whole.

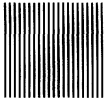
This vision of an expanded role for Critical Theory is an important one—which we believe could help management and policy studies develop as a more mature subject. However, in our opinion, it is even more difficult and less likely than Zald suggests, because the universe is expanding, and more and more defined by practice.

Practice-based knowledge has always developed alongside the world that Zald describes. In the post-Second World War period, it has developed its own planetary orbits and trajectories in research and training. It is now larger, by far, than the university world Zald writes about and it threatens to render his cosmology largely irrelevant. This commentary briefly describes the larger playing field where knowledge about management and policy is also developing, and suggests what Critical Management Theory might do to become a gravitational force there.

Mode 2

In *The New Production of Knowledge*, Michael Gibbons and five colleagues (Gibbons et al., 1994) juxtapose the central tendencies of university research with a rapidly growing and very different set of practices. The universe most familiar to readers of this journal, and the one Zald describes, works in what these scholars call 'Mode 1'. The key forces are

1350-5084[200208]9:3;447–452;026793



Organization 9(3)

Symposium: On Critical Management Studies

individuals working in a disciplinary context. Sheltered in universities, knowledge production is cognitive and validated by relatively slow, hierarchical processes of institutionalized peer review. It is applied later, if at all, by others.

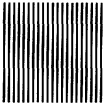
The Mode 2 universe, in contrast, revolves around heterogeneous groups of workers addressing practical problems, often across organizational boundaries. Little attention is paid to Mode 1 disciplines and hierarchies, though knowledge workers are typically trained in this tradition. Time is critical; this is a world that values speed. And it values variety. Knowledge therefore tends to be transient. Solutions are validated and changed in use. Truth might be a small pale moon, but problem-solving is the sun.

The book describes many reasons for Mode 2's growth. The most important of these are aspects of globalization with which we are all familiar. New products being developed for expanding markets require new skills and information. Technology is dramatically increasing available data and minimizing locational and time barriers to its diffusion. Varied communication channels, more and more dominated by the World Wide Web, provide opportunities for observation and learning. Meanwhile, established tasks are disaggregating, and intermediaries are disappearing as knowledge producers, like producers of other goods, deal more directly with their primary suppliers and end users.

This description is overly simplistic, but it points to significant differences that can be seen in many realms of activity. Juxtapose Microsoft (a relatively new company that still operates with Mode 1 rules) and open source Linux as an example. Compare the discovery of DNA with the genome project. Think about the Rolling Stones and techno. In policy sciences, contrast textbooks with airport bestsellers. Each of these examples suggests dissimilar ways of being in the world and learning more about it. The differences are in 'central tendencies', even though each approach knows about, and to some extent draws upon, the other.

In Sight

Conscious of Mode 2 activities, management and policy sciences have altered some teaching, service and research activities. Interdisciplinary courses, internships, company-tailored programmes and bids for external research partners are among the indicators of our responsiveness. Mode 2 is also aware of and draws on Mode 1, but it can be argued that we offer intermediary activities with a declining role in their world. Increasing numbers of students come to business schools, but we are no longer the only educational providers. A wide range of insiders (corporate universities and HR departments) and outsiders (consulting firms, professional trainers, etc.) are not just taking market share, but redefining management training and how it can be delivered. On the research side, a post-war glut of over-production sent PhDs to industry, government, think tanks and other settings. They are now knowledge producers



In Sight, but Out of Mind

Anne Sigismund Huff & James Oran Huff

transcending their training, and the knowledge produced is not easily available to or recognized in university settings.

Not only are Mode 2 practices developing teaching and research alternatives largely invisible to those who revolve around universities, our world is also shrinking. Research partnerships tend to be small and based on little real collaboration. University enrolments continue to increase world-wide, but in many places professorial teaching is being systematically supplanted by contracted teaching assistants and outsider lecturers. Our service engagements tend to be low-paid consulting activities that rarely involve central players in large corporations. Professorial research is under-funded, and distracted by administrative and other assignments.

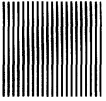
A case for continuing implosion can be made, yet these and other signposts have generated relatively little response—the evidence is in sight, but often out of mind. Perhaps we don't do more to address the dilemmas posed by the expanding universe at our door because it is so difficult to engage the increasingly large and interconnected organizational systems we study. To be more effective we would have to retool and reorganize. Consulting firms offer one alternative model. Although their activities are easy to contest, especially after evidence from Enron and Anderson, at least it should be noted that the major consulting firms are of the size required for engagement, and they have been making much more money for what they do than we have.

The central issue, however, is that new frames of reference are needed to operate effectively across the cosmological boundaries we have drawn on Zald to describe. Not only is the territory new, the required mindsets are elusive because our old (Mode 1) frames of reference are so well entrenched. Yet, new ways of thinking and acting are unlikely to emerge until these anchors from the past are transcended.

Critical Theory's Contribution to Mindfulness

And here, at last, is the major point of discussion. Critical Theory's strength is in challenging taken-for-granted assumptions and frameworks. We think the pattern of reflexivity it provides is essential to rising above the knowledge being achieved in either Mode 1 or Mode 2. However, Zald raises serious questions about success in the first world; we reluctantly concur, and raise even more questions about success in the second.

Zald takes a very broad view of Critical Theory. Although he points to Marxist-influenced roots in German social democratic theory, he recognizes conservative as well as leftist traditions. The emphasis is on all those who have challenged positivism and its natural science allegiances, and helped introduce cultural, language-based or historical alternatives drawing on the humanities. Thus, he includes the anthropologist Clifford Gertz as a critical theorist tradition, and would presumably add figures as diverse as Anthony Giddens and Karl Weick.



Organization 9(3) Symposium: On Critical Management Studies

The very breadth of Zald's definition might be seen as tipping his agenda for greater influence towards success, but his study of the sociology of professions pushes him towards a desire for unified 'planets' with established trajectories, held together by meta-assumptions about epistemology, ontology and methods, and institutionalized in the politics and structures of organization. By these standards, Zald feels that Critical Management Studies in business schools has a history of less than a decade in the United States, though a longer presence in Europe, while the most established models of Critical Theory in other professional schools (notably in law and education) are less than half a century old.

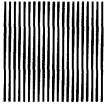
But here, we feel, Zald appears to make a significant mistake. Looking to the past, he seems to want Critical Management Studies to create and institutionalize a new orbit in a Mode 1 framework. If that world is losing ground, influence there will make less and less difference to management education, practice or knowledge production. And, if Gibbons and his colleagues are right, influence in a Mode 2 world cannot be as routinized as would be desired from Mode 1 experience.

Many questions could be asked from a 'new, more relevant' Critical Theory platform. From a leftist perspective, what group is better suited to discuss the unintended consequences of the pursuit of profit? But it is a mistake to assume that this is a question of interest only to the left. What are the consequences of private organizations taking over work that used to be considered the work of nations? How are we to proceed in a post 11 September world that does not appear to have common ground for conversations about individual rights and social influence? These do not have to be pre-defined ideological debates, and they can be joined by other discussions about the requirements and shape of management in a devolving world.

We believe that challenges from a more robust Critical Management Theory could make important contributions to both Mode 1 and the Mode 2 attempts to understand management and policy. Both conversations are young and relatively disinclined to introspection. A distanced voice that is willing to criticize seems to be especially needed in Mode 2, but we are pessimistic about its development. Zald outlines some of the difficulties involved in moving to a more central position in the Mode 1 world. The problems are even more daunting in trying to engage Mode 2.

Several things would have to happen if Critical Management Theory were to bid for a central role in discussions that involve those operating in a Mode 2 universe, and none of those things seems likely to occur. The first, and least clear, involves desire. Do significant numbers of Critical Management Theorists want to directly engage Mode 2 players? Zald suggests that the will to become central players in a Mode 1 world is open to question. A science fiction leap across space into Mode 2 is even more in doubt.

A second barrier is the language of Critical Theory. The rapid and changing world of Mode 2 is unlikely to learn its vocabulary, but to what



In Sight, but Out of Mind

Anne Sigismund Huff & James Oran Huff

extent can its nuances be put in plainer language and moved away from internal referencing? Effective engagement must be built on references to organizational as well as theoretic concerns. The first is more important than the second, especially in the beginning.

Even more problematic, in our view, engagement will require a change in tone. Those of us with teenagers, or experience trying to support organizational change, know that appreciation is a more likely foundation for conversation and movement than criticism, though criticism may be part of the message. How appealing will that be to people who have enjoyed and benefited from the removed observer's post?

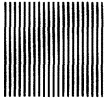
Further, the observer's challenging post is much more compatible with the logic of Mode 1 than Mode 2. There is a history of pluralism for pluralism's sake in universities that encourages faculty and administrators to tolerate, and even support, positions that they do not find personally compelling. If business school faculty, and more particularly Critical Theorists, are to be influential in Mode 2, we must make our case with fewer institutional supports. Mode 2 knowledge producers are under pressure for results and less willing than their university counterparts to engage in secondary conversations.

A final, and perhaps most challenging, concern involves the level of interest in providing alternatives. The most engaged Critical Theorists have enjoyed challenging existing frames more than constructing alternative frameworks. But entry into Mode 2 tends to be granted to those who bring solutions, or inputs to solutions, along with problem definitions. Here, again, an unlikely change in activity would seem to be required.

This list of requirements for playing a role in Mode 2 knowledge production is open to revision, but the questions just asked suggest the inevitable difficulties of that ambition. If Critical Management Theorists are to cross the Mode 1/Mode 2 divide they must face the dilemmas that have already been described as supporting in sight but out of mind behaviour. Increasingly large and interconnected systems will be hard for critical theorists to engage. Within university settings, major schools (engineering more than business) and major departments (science more than social science) tend to be the most powerful voices. Size seems to be even more influential in Mode 2. Reorganization and retooling to attract attention there will be painful and costly. Rapid transitions in organizational work will require that those transitions be revisited. New and elusive frameworks for thought and practice will be required, and old frameworks will have to be abandoned – all difficult work, but absolutely essential work.

Conclusion

Is the universe of management and policy thought radically expanding? If so, does 'Mode 2' provide the right descriptors? This phrase is meant to sharpen the nature of an important crossroad for Critical Management



Organization 9(3)

Symposium: On Critical Management Studies

Studies, but it is largely irrelevant to the basic point we wish to make. That point is that Critical Theory can play an important role in the world of practice, though the opportunity may not be sufficiently attractive to mobilize this difficult move. Yet we hope that Critical Theorists will move, and support new forms of engagement for us all.

Note

1 'In Sight but out of Mind' is the title of a paper written by Michael McGrath, a DBA student at Cranfield School of Management, UK. He was interested in the match between acknowledged levels of risk and managerial mitigation efforts and found an inverse correlation between the two in the first organization he studied. We think Michael is naming a very basic and interesting aspect of thought and action; one worth contemplating at different levels in many arenas.

Reference

Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzman, S., Scott, P. and Trow, M. (1994) *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Anne Sigismund Huff is Director of the Advanced Institute for Management (AIM), an initiative funded by the UK government. She also has joint professorial appointments at the Center for Advanced Research and Teaching in the Social Sciences (CARTSS) at the University of Colorado and Cranfield School of Management. She received an MA in Sociology and a PhD in Management from Northwestern University, and has been on the faculty at UCLA and the University of Illinois. Her research interests focus on strategic change, both as a dynamic process of interaction among firms and as a cognitive process affected by the interaction of individuals over time. She is the strategy editor for the book series *Foundations in Organization Science* (Sage Publications) and serves on the editorial boards of the *Strategic Management Journal*, the *Journal of Management Studies*, the *British Journal of Management*, *Management Learning* and the electronic journal, *M@n@gement*. In 1998–9 she was President of the Academy of Management, an international organization of over 12,000 scholars interested in management issues. **Address:** Cranfield School of Management, Cranfield, Bedfordshire MK43 0AL, UK. [email: anne.huff@cranfield.ac.uk]

James Oran Huff is a professor and past chair of the geography department at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He is interested in decision-making in complex environments and has been instrumental in developing spatial search models of residential mobility processes. Currently, he is investigating the effects of immigration on neighborhood change in US cities. **Address:** Department of Geography, University of Colorado at Boulder, 260 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-0260, USA. [email: james.huff@colorado.edu]