

Bell, E., & Bridgman, T. (2017). Why management learning matters. *Management Learning*, 48(1), 3-6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507616679058>. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications

Why Management Learning Matters

The past year has been one of transition for the *Management Learning* editorial team. Ann Cunliffe stood down at the end of 2016 from her role as joint Editor-in-Chief, a position she took up in 2010 following 5 years as Associate Editor. Over the course of those 12 years, Ann acted in an editorial role for more than 400 papers. Through her contributions to understanding reflexivity and her work in building communities of research practice in qualitative research, Ann attracted new and established scholars from a wide range of disciplines to engage with, and publish in the journal. During our transition into the Editors-in-Chief role, Ann has been an invaluable source of guidance and support. We thank her for her outstanding service to the journal.

Ann's departure means this is our first joint editorial as incoming Editors-in-Chief and we take this opportunity to explain why *Management Learning* continues to be a journal that matters in the field of management learning and education. In addition to the core features of reflection and critique that are highlighted by the journal strapline, we want to emphasise the importance of 'engagement'. This underlying motif cuts across many of the papers published in the journal, as well as the approach to scholarship that those who contribute to it value and encourage.

While terms like 'impact' and 'relevance' have become increasingly popular and continue to be much debated in management research, we suggest 'engagement' offers a more meaningful, and perhaps less readily instrumentalized term, that encapsulates the diverse and multidirectional relationships between those who share an interest in the study of management learning. This includes learning which takes place in the context of the business school, in addition to practices and processes related to the creation and dissemination of diverse forms of knowledge in a wide range of organizations. This is one of the features that distinguishes *Management Learning* from other journals in the field such as *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, and *Journal of Management Education*.

The importance of engagement in *Management Learning* can be traced back to the journal's foundation in 1970. The impetus for its development stemmed from initiatives focusing on managerial learning and the training of business school educators, under the auspices of the Association of Teachers in Management, and led by scholars at Manchester Business School and Lancaster University Centre for the Study of Management Learning. Initially named *Management Education and Development (MEAD)*, subsequently retitled *Management Learning* in 1994ⁱ, the journal has remained at the forefront of developments in the field by challenging conventional ideas and received wisdom.

Ten years ago one of us published an article in the journal on the topic of engagement, and in particular, the possibilities for management educators to be 'critical' and 'engaged' (Bridgman, 2007). It observed that critical management scholars were seen to be more interested in talking amongst themselves than with audiences beyond the academy, whilst engagement was often narrowly interpreted as requiring the silencing of critique. The article concluded, optimistically (and perhaps naively), that it did not have to be a choice between critical or engaged – that demands on business schools for engagement provided opportunities for critical scholars to engage in ways that affirmed the democratic function of the university.

Ten years on, the need for engagement has intensified. The world has experienced a financial crisis, there is growing realisation of the potentially catastrophic effects of global environmental change, and issues of democracy and inequality are at the forefront of public discourse. To be sure, in our increasingly commoditized higher education sector, there are forces working against critical engagement. But there are also fresh opportunities, such as the emergence of the UN Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME). As sceptics have noted, PRME might be the latest bandwagon for business schools to jump on to reassure critics that they have the best interests of society at heart, enabling them to preserve their legitimacy and carry on with 'business schooling-as-usual'. However, PRME can also provide legitimacy for the critical orientation to our teaching, research and interactions with individuals and organisations in the community. *Management Learning* has a role to play in providing a forum to reflect on these issues, report on progress being made, and consider the challenges for the future.

A decade on, debate continues about the meaning of critical management studies (Prasad et al, 2016). At its best, this debate reflects the increasing diversity of critical management scholarship across multiple dimensions – gender, ethnicity, geographical location and intellectual orientation. However, we also sense a growing desire to avoid getting bogged down in discussions of what counts as CMS and what doesn't, who is 'in' and who isn't. We need to celebrate our shared interests and concerns, as well as our differences, and to direct our efforts in extending the reach of critical scholarship (Parker, 2016).

Taking engagement seriously means thinking about the audiences for our work and how we write. Knowledge is created in *Management Learning* through what Boyer (1990) refers to as 'scholarship of integration'. This involves making connections across disciplines and presenting ideas in ways that are intelligible by non-specialists as well as scholars. This point was made over 30 years ago by former *Management Learning* editors, Mark Easterby-Smith and Mike Pedler (1986), who called for discussions of theory without unnecessary jargon and discussions of practice that connect with theoretical debates. It is also made by Grey and Sinclair (2006: 445), who challenge critical scholars to 'write differently' (that is, to not be 'pretentious, obscurantist and dull'). *Management Learning* has welcomed different forms of scholarly writing in the past, and will continue to do so. We are also conscious that to sharpen our engagement with the diversity of audiences within the management learning community, we should discourage unnecessarily long papers. Therefore, we will only consider initial submissions of no more than 9,000 words (all inclusive), with papers longer than this being sent back to authors for revision.

Engagement also involves seeking to transcend binary divisions between research and teaching that position the latter as subordinate to the former. As both researchers of learning and providers of learning opportunities in the classroom and in organisations, we understand well the problems created by seeing these as separate, and privileging one at the expense of the other. We have watched with interest the introduction of the Teaching Evaluation Framework (TEF) in the UK, an initiative which is claimed to be a means of raising the profile of education, but which risks commodifying teaching in the same way as has happened with research evaluation.

The pressure to publish, and the development and spread of a journal hierarchy based on global rankings (Mingers and Willmott, 2013), also has the potential to encourage the standardization of intellectual engagement. As incoming editors, we welcome articles that analyse the contemporary power and politics of management learning, education and knowledge creation practices in diverse global contexts, and draw on a wide range of perspectives including postcolonial theory as well as interpretive, including (auto)ethnographic analyses.

As journal editors, we are acutely aware of the importance of journal metrics and their importance in defining and shaping academic careers. While we therefore celebrate the increase in the journal's 2015 impact factor - with the 2-year impact factor now at 1.393 and the 5-year at 2.167 - this is moderated by a concern to ensure that a focus on rankings does not compromise the mission of the journal and the integrity of the scholarly process. An example relates to author responses to journal reviewers and editors, which in some journals have become lengthy documents – sometimes longer than the paper itself. There are parallels to be drawn here with cultures of audit which rely on formalised processes of demonstrating accountability through explicit checking and verification (Power, 1997). Power's argument is that programmatic and technological regulatory systems do not necessarily improve the quality of the thing they are intended to regulate. At the extreme, they can become a process of ritualised, self-referential inspection whereby the fact that it is done becomes more important than the purpose it serves. At *Management Learning*, we encourage concise author response documents that summarise and point to the changes made to the paper, rather than supplant it.

Engagement involves educators and students; it arises in the intersection between managerial practice and theory and is fundamental to the development of knowledge based on interactions between reviewers, editors and authors. In relation to the latter, we are acutely aware that the success of *Management Learning* relies on the principle of *noblesse oblige*, whereby experienced researchers - including members of the International Editorial Board - behave honourably, generously and responsibly in helping others (Northcraft and Tenbrunsel, 2012). It is only through this that other scholars, including early career researchers, can develop their craft and find their voices as authors.

The value we ascribe to the development of scholarship is illustrated in a new feature for the journal, '*Management Learning Meets...*', a video series edited by Social Media Editor, Deborah Brewis, Kingston University, UK. The video series provides an additional medium through which *Management Learning* authors can engage with audiences and pursue interactions with practice. This acknowledges the multimodal nature of engagement as an embodied and enacted practice that increasingly takes place online, as well as in classrooms. One of the videos features Leah Tomkins, Open University, UK and Eda Ulus, University of Leicester, UK, talking about their 2016 paper 'Oh, was *that* "experiential learning"?!' Spaces, synergies and surprises with Kolb's learning cycle'. The authors discuss their experience of publishing in *Management Learning*, which they describe as a process of articulating their lived experience as management scholars and educators, and being encouraged by reviewers to take risks in developing critiques of established practice. They conclude that if we fail to give voice to things we are uncertain about, we risk losing authenticity and credibility as scholars and educators. We regard their message as evidence of the importance of *Management Learning* in enabling critique and speaking out on issues that matter to management scholars, educators and learners.

Ann Cunliffe's departure from the editorship is not the only editorial team change at the journal. Monica Kostera stood down from her role as Associate Editor at the end of 2016, having fostered development of innovative and creative scholarship in the journal for the past five years. We thank Monica for her consistent dedication to the journal and its communities. At the same time, we welcome two new Associate Editors who join the team at the start of 2017. Steve Kempster, Lancaster University Management School, UK, brings with him a wealth of expertise in leadership learning and practice. For example, his 2010 paper in *Management Learning* is based on a practitioner-leader collaboration, and takes an autoethnographic approach to understanding leadership learning and development as a situated practice of becoming. We regard this article as typical of the innovative, engaging work that the journal seeks to encourage. We also welcome

Alexia Panayiotou, University of Cyprus, as our second incoming Associate Editor. Alexia's research focuses on storytelling, identity, gender and visual representations of management. She will provide much needed editorial expertise in these areas that have historically been core to *Management Learning*.

On behalf of the editorial team, we look forward to adding a new chapter to the journal's rich history, to ensure it remains true to its mission and to develop it in ways that foster engagement. In a world characterised by social, environmental and economic crises, there is an urgent need for a critical reflexive scholarship on learning and education. Our aim is for *Management Learning* to remain the leading outlet for such work.

References

- Boyer EL (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. New York: Jossey Bass.
- Bridgman T (2007) Reconstituting relevance: Exploring possibilities for management educators' critical engagement with the public. *Management Learning* 38: 425-439.
- Easterby-Smith M and Pedler M (1986) Editorial. *Management Learning* 7(3): 3-4.
- Grey C and Sinclair A (2006) Writing differently. *Organization* 13(3): 443-453.
- Kempster S and Stewart J (2010) Becoming a leader: A co-produced autoethnographic exploration of situated learning of leadership practice. *Management Learning* 41(2): 205-219.
- Mingers J and Willmott H (2013) Taylorizing business school research: On the 'one best way' performative effects of journal ranking lists. *Human Relations*, 66: 1051-1073.
- Northcraft GB and Tenbrunsel AE (2012) Publications, contributions and the social dilemma of scholarly productivity: A reaction to Aguinis, Debruin, Cunningham, Hall, Culpepper and Gottfredson. *Academy of Management Learning and Education* 11(2): 303-308.
- Parker M (2016) Provincialising Manchester, or America strikes back. *Management Learning* DOI: 10.1177/1350507616664434
- Power M (1997) *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Prasad A, Prasad P, Mills A and Helms Mills J (eds) (2016) *The Routledge Companion to Critical Management Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Tomkins, L., and Ulus, E. (2016) 'Oh, was that "experiential learning"?!' Spaces, synergies and surprises with Kolb's learning cycle, *Management Learning*. 47, 158-178.

ⁱ We are grateful to Lisa Anderson for sharing her analysis of the history of *Management Learning*.