

The Proper Place of
Organizational
Scholarship: A
Comment on Hinings
and Greenwood

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Appearing as it does at the end of 2002, the Hinings and Greenwood ASQ forum is very timely. This has been a tumultuous, scandalous year for business organizations, especially in North America. Some firms' financial statements have been found to be deliberately misleading. Some accounting and financial services firms have been aiding and abetting this duplicitous process. The credibility of some Wall Street stock analysts has been called into question. Several corporate executives have found devious ways to hide debt, inflate profits, and enrich themselves at their companies' and shareholders' expense.

These actions have had multiple societal effects. They have had immediate negative impacts on retirees and their pension plans and on employees whose jobs have been lost. They have had wide-ranging negative impacts on stock prices, on confidence in corporations, and on national economies. These effects have been global, even though many of the organizations concerned are headquartered in the United States. There is no question that, as Hinings and Greenwood argue, organizations especially, although not only business organizations, have significant impacts on society. It may take scandals that are this large in scope for organizations' impacts on society to be widely recognized.

The corporate scandals have resulted in challenges to the roles of business school professors. In scholarly publications, trade publications, and news articles, there have been questions and discussion about the extent to which the scandals are due to deficiencies in the way ethics is taught in business schools (e.g., Gioia, 2002; Mangan, 2002; Seligman, 2002). Questions have been raised, for example, about the extent to which business school professors benefit from sitting on corporate boards and thus are not willing to critique the companies by which they are rewarded (e.g., Mangan, 2002). Most of these challenges to professors have almost entirely ignored the research they carry out. Implicitly, if not always explicitly, the image has been conveyed that the important way—almost the only way—business school professors have a meaningful impact on business organizations and society is through their teaching, including, perhaps, their case writing.

It is not only with regard to ethical issues that the relevance and potential contribution of organizational and management research has been challenged. Papers in a special research forum in the *Academy of Management Journal* in 2001 (Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft, 2001) and a special issue of the *British Journal of Management* later that same year (Starkey and Madan, 2001) both focus on disconnects between management research and managers. Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft (2001) focused on the "knowledge gap" between academics and practitioners and described several correlates of it, including academics' presentation of information in a way that is relatively incomprehensible to managers, as well as the frequent experience of managers that academic research trails practice rather than leading it. Starkey and Madan (2001) argued that management research is often irrelevant to practice, that it typically follows a "mode 1" approach to knowledge creation that is discipline-based and more concerned about theory than about practice. In contrast, they

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advocated "mode 2" approaches to research (Gibbons et al., 1994) that are less concerned about theory development but that involve academics and practitioners collaborating to address problems defined within specific and localized contexts. While the authors of papers in these special issues did not always agree with any particular approach to management research, they all agreed on the need for more connections between researchers and practitioners.

It is worthwhile to consider Hinings and Greenwood's argument in light of these two sets of challenges to business school professors. On the one hand, an underlying message of both challenges is that in order to have an impact on business and, by implication, a wider range of organizations in society, professors need to be directly involved with business organizations and their managers. They should teach business students to be more ethical, and they should conduct research that is directly relevant to organizational practice. They should find a way to do this such that they are not beholden to the organizations they study, even while they are intimately familiar with these organizations and their dynamics.

Hinings and Greenwood, on the other hand, question whether professors who are situated in business schools and who identify themselves primarily as business school professors are able to raise and do raise broad questions and challenges about both the roles and effects of organizations in society and who controls organizations, especially as these issues affect patterns of privilege and disadvantage. They argue that as organizational scholarship moved to business schools in the latter decades of the twentieth century, these important questions have faded from consciousness. To the (minimal) extent that they are being raised now, they are being raised primarily by scholars who identify themselves as sociologists. Being situated in a business school, almost of itself, may militate against a capacity to critique business and other organizations and their societal effects. But such criticism is a proper role of academia, especially since organizations are so dominant throughout the world.

Their argument is very important. It reminds readers of larger purposes for research and of a role for the academic profession that extends beyond individual classrooms, schools, research programs, corporations, and industries. It is a crucial antidote to unthinking approaches to relevance. It reminds us that professors can, whether consciously or not, lose their independence of thought and values, especially if they are rewarded for taking on particular value systems that may not be completely consistent with academic values. It is easy to take an uncritical view of a business or any other organization about which one is teaching. This can happen especially if professors benefit directly or indirectly from the organization, such as through having it as a consulting client. One way of putting this is that the location or "place" from which research arises is likely to have a substantial impact on the nature of the research questions professors raise and the ways they address the questions. Place refers here both to the scholarly community with which researchers identify and the kinds of relationships they have with the organizations

and larger society they study. Are there places that are more or less proper for organizational scholarship?

Pondering Hinings and Greenwood's argument and reflecting on various possible places for scholarship lead me to three additional questions. The questions do not challenge the basic premise of the argument Hinings and Greenwood are posing about a view of organizational scholarship that recognizes questions about values in a larger society. I agree with them on this. This reflection does, however, pose issues about how and where the type of organizational researcher role Hinings and Greenwood advocate is best situated. The questions are: (1) Who are the appropriate stakeholders of research on business and organizations and their impacts on society? (2) What are the implied relationships between organizational scholars and those who manage organizations, as well as other stakeholders of scholarly work? and (3) How is research about organizations and their impacts likely to have, or not have, an impact on its stakeholders?

I realize that by using the term "stakeholders" I am employing a business school term, one that, as Hinings and Greenwood say, keeps us focused on an organization more than on its effects. But the conduct of research often takes place within the organizational context of a department, school, and university. It is not done in isolation from organizational experience, a fact that makes Hinings and Greenwood's argument pertinent to those who work in universities as well as those who work in other organizational settings.

Who Are the Appropriate Stakeholders?

Who should benefit from the research that deals with organizations and their societal impacts? Are the primary beneficiaries supposed to be other scholars? Are organizations and their top managers and/or, perhaps, lower-level employees supposed to benefit? Is society at large supposed to benefit? Is there competition between stakeholders in such a way that what benefits one set of stakeholders is of less benefit to other stakeholders?

In describing most major research that addresses values as being undertaken by sociologists, and in emphasizing the publication of this work in scholarly journals, it seems to me that Hinings and Greenwood are suggesting, at least implicitly, that the major beneficiaries of such work are other organizational scholars. In their suggestion that scholarly articles might include implications for policy for societal groups, they are indicating that society at large might be an appropriate beneficiary, although the links to the broader society are a bit more tenuous than the links to other researchers. There is less of an indication that senior managers will benefit, at least in terms of gaining information about how to be more efficient and effective, which is the more common benefit they have come to expect from organizational scholarship.

The lack of consideration for how organizations and their senior managers might benefit is a potential limiting condition of the argument. In one sense, it gives credence to current arguments that the only way professors have impacts on managers (or management students) is through teaching;

scholarly work does not directly involve them. Moreover, in theory, at least, for changes to occur in organizations (e.g., their becoming more societally responsive), organizations and their senior managers generally need to play a role. Thus, explicitly including managers as stakeholders of this kind of research is important.

What Are the Implied Relationships between Scholars and Stakeholders?

One inference that can be drawn from Hinings and Greenwood's argument is that if one really wishes to address values questions about the impacts of organizations in society, it is better to remain a bit separate from day-to-day considerations of business and organizational practice, for example, by being in a sociology department rather than in a business school. This might be due to the reasons given above: the value systems needed to critique organizations' impacts may be more likely to fade into the background in business schools. Implicitly, if not explicitly, this conveys a message that managers, or students learning to be managers, are not particularly interested in serious discussion of the impacts of organizations within their larger society. Organizational sociologists are likely to be much more interested in addressing these issues.

I think, however, that it is likely to be productive to include managers, as well as others affected by organizations, in direct consideration of the values issues Hinings and Greenwood are raising. Several observers have noted that thoughtful managers often have much to bring to the table on issues of values. Van de Ven (2002: 178), among others, has argued, "It is vain to think that researchers have a monopoly on knowledge creation," especially about issues like this that are very pertinent to organizational experience. Rather, it is likely that many senior managers and others who are experiencing the societal impacts of managerial actions are sometimes very aware of the kinds of issues being raised by Hinings and Greenwood, and their perspectives on it would be valuable to incorporate into the development of scholarly knowledge on this topic.

Certainly, incorporating different and perhaps conflictual views about issues of values in organizations while maintaining scholars' own views is often difficult to accomplish well. Andrew Pettigrew (2001: S62), whom Hinings and Greenwood describe as a role model for the kind of work they advocate, has discussed what is required as "challenging and transcending the current beliefs and knowledge of those stakeholders we work with whilst also engaging with those beliefs, [and] preserving researcher autonomy as a precondition to build scholarly identity and creativity whilst encouraging different forms of engagement with stakeholder communities." It requires considerable skill on the part of researchers to do this. But this kind of skill may be very beneficial for accomplishing the aims Hinings and Greenwood have set.

Pettigrew's emphasis on the importance of scholars' engagement with their stakeholders, even while preserving their autonomy, is similar to calls that have been made to universi-

ties in recent years to become more directly involved in their local and regional contexts and to appreciate their responsibilities within these civic contexts (e.g., Boyer, 1990; Barber, 1991). In recent years, those who have discussed the "scholarship of engagement," following Boyer's (1990) work, have emphasized that it is very important for academics to become much more engaged with their constituencies and to frame their work from the perspective of such engagement. Barber (1991) emphasized that this refers neither to academics conforming to particular (e.g., business) fads nor to their maintaining academic life within a separate ivory tower. Rather, it implies that the work done in universities, including research, should take explicit account of civic life and concern and should be done together with the community of those involved in scholars' study.

To my mind, Hinings and Greenwood's essay is a profound illustration of civic and societal concern, of addressing crucially important issues that have not been dealt with adequately in much current organizational research. What it does not emphasize as much as it might is how scholars interested in the issue of values can express that interest in a way that involves their stakeholders more directly in the conversation, rather than simply acknowledging practitioners' concerns in scholarly publication.

How Is Research Likely to Have an Impact?

In what ways, if at all, do academic researchers see themselves truly as having an impact on organizations within larger societies? How much influence over organizational action do academics want to have? Do they want to be on the outside criticizing? Do they want to effect changes in managerial behavior? One way of putting this, using Hinings and Greenwood's terminology, is Do academics (want to) control organizations? And if so, how?

Hinings and Greenwood do not really raise this question. A suggestion that an academic paper might include implications for practice and/or policy is not the same as a suggestion of ways that academics might become directly involved in policy development processes. Simply writing about organizations in relation to their larger society may not lead to any modification in practice if the work remains solely in academic journals, no matter how prestigious the journals. Change requires active leadership, perhaps of the kind that managers sometimes learn to demonstrate as part of their job.

It may be that accomplishing societal change is not the appropriate aim for academics, at least in their scholarly roles. But academics' reflections on the kinds of impacts and influence they would like their work to have, and the means by which to accomplish this, especially if these means are more properly through some of their stakeholders, is very important.

Conclusion

Hinings and Greenwood raise crucial issues, especially in contrast to other pulls on academics associated with business schools and especially during a time of corporate scan-

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dal that has evident societal impacts. What can be added to their argument is the recognition that it is also important for academics to be more cognizant of the multiple stakeholders of their work, of ways they more or less implicitly think about these stakeholders and the appropriate relationships to have with them, of the type of impact they wish their work to have, and of the means to have such an impact.

If business school professors are able to avoid getting “caught” by the organizations about which they teach and research—if they are able to be in, but not of these settings—they are in a unique position not only to write about organizations and their larger effects, but also to have a societal impact themselves. The challenge, of course, is to be cognizant enough of their larger society to be able to understand the impacts organizations have in it, separate enough from organizations and their managers to critique them and their impacts, engaged enough with organizations and their managers to appreciate their concerns and the dilemmas involved in action, and aware enough of the kinds of impacts they want to have and how to accomplish these to be able to act appropriately. If this can happen, academic research will take a central place in addressing the issues about which Hinings and Greenwood care so deeply.

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