

Ian King

Re-thinking our management voice? or

Realizing the value of the management choir!

Abstract

In a recent debate generated by Deloitte's (as part of their on-line debates series), they asked: 'Are People an organization's most important asset?'

The debate still continues on their site (see above) but generally most respondents seem to support this question. Where it originated from – I do not know! Yet, it is one that has dominated management and organization studies for the past fifty plus years!! For some traditionalists this assumption (and others like it) is an anathema; for it (they) exposes a number of continuing inconsistencies that do little to enhance the standing of this field across the academic community. Let me enlarge a little, we can witness when visiting any academic bookshop a split within the display on the shelves of titles from the management and organization studies community. At one end, we are likely to witness a collection of texts that we can crudely group around traditionalists. Those striving to maintain a firm grasp on scientific values often focused around areas that look to improve internal efficiency and effectiveness. Whereas in this same section, perhaps at the other end of the same shelf, we can also witness another quite different set of texts, ones that seek to challenge existing paradigms. Texts that perhaps realising this field's eclectic nature, intentionally employ alternate voices – perhaps via critical studies and via other academic disciplines (such as arts, humanities, cognitive and social sciences etc.). This latter collection crudely is seeking to respond to an external focus, one that looks to generate new thinking or creation. The result may suggest to the lay-reader that this apparent disharmony suggests a confused field and one that is at odds with itself!!

However, I do not think this is the case. I would argue that what we are witnessing is something analogous to a developing 'management choir'. My proposed response to the theme of this conference is to appreciate that this whole collection of texts represents a significant positive for the management and organization studies community and that together, these voices produce a (continually developing and improving) rich vibrant sound. Let me enlarge, as we bear witness to this array of texts on the shelves of the bookshops, we should not be critical of this seemingly conflictory range but in fact, applaud this field's confidence to challenge itself and, most importantly, continue to challenge itself as the field continues to develop. These books provide evidence of the range necessary to encompass the range and depth of this difficult and challenging field. Attempting to find (if this is objective?) one common voice to express this field (as perhaps other academic fields/disciplines can demonstrate) is folly. Let us applaud the diversity (and relationships) of this field. The paper proposed here will develop this argument further with specific examples and amplify the potential of developing the management choir!