

The Responsibilities of Management Intellectuals: A Survey

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In 1967, Noam Chomsky issued a ringing condemnation of the American intellectual classes, especially university academics, with regard to the Vietnam War. In essence, Chomsky read their silence as complicity with the atrocities committed by an imperial regime. Certainly there are many things which intellectuals are silent about, but here we would like to discuss whether silence has become complicity in the realm of business and management studies. Let us consider some facts. In a survey we have conducted of the papers published within the top business and management journals over two years¹ we found that over 98% did not acknowledge the relationship between business practice and war, global violence, or the displacement and dispossession of populations. Over 90% paid no substantial attention to unsafe or exploitative working conditions around the world. 2,296 of the top 2,331 articles we surveyed did not consider questions of race, international migration, or neo-colonialism. And despite the increasing attention being afforded to ethical business practices, almost 85% of the articles surveyed failed to examine the issues of corporate social responsibility or business ethics. In fact, our study found a remarkable lack of attention being paid to the pressing social and political issues of our day. Why is business and management scholarship so marginal to the central concerns of many people on our planet? Do such scholars have a responsibility to stop being silent?

Business academics are quick to tell their students what they would already like to believe – that business and management practices are at the heart of contemporary life. The students believe it because, as this journal has often noted, they are subject to these practices, even as they imagine they will one day master them. Business academics believe it because they have watched their schools move to the centre of

universities whilst their labour market and salaries have become the envy of other academics. Governments believe it, and bow before business knowledge as much as business wealth. And all of us feel it in the buzz and hum of stock markets, interest rates, advertisements, and celebrities, where the only thing that keeps us from becoming lost in the revelry of the commodity fetish is the accompanying sober call to self-management.

Nevertheless, if management practices are indeed widely asserted to be at the centre of our lives, how can it be that other issues at the centre of our lives are so absent within the top business and management journals? Can anyone argue that war, environmental destruction, prejudice, health, race and migration, or the gap between rich and poor are not important for contemporary life? No matter how one prefers to address such questions, and what politics one brings to them, to deny the centrality of these matters hardly seems a credible or defensible position. Particularly for people who claim to be at the centre of things.

Our study of 2,331 articles published in what were the discipline's twenty leading journals in the last RAE² (Geary *et al.* 2004) tells us something about isolation rather than centrality. The study takes account of every article (with the exception of book reviews and short editorials) published within each of the top 20 ranked business and management journals during the years 2004 and 2003³. The statistics are derived from a ten point manual content analysis of the abstract, key-word and conclusion sections. Each of the criteria by which the articles are analysed comes in the form of a question towards which a 'yes' or 'no' answer is given. The rationale for each of these

questions, along with technical clarifications as to how each of the distinctions is formalised, is outlined in the appendix.

Our study can certainly tell us what UK based management academics are not doing. They are not paying any sustained attention to war and violence, racism and sexism, population movements and displacement, mal-distribution of wealth, accidents and ill-health in the workplace, or gender and sexuality. Less than one percent of these 2,331 articles found any room for a discussion of sexuality. Only 80 of them engaged gender perspectives. 2,037 did not touch upon the relationship between business practices and the social distribution of wealth. Even that most traditional concern of business and management – unions and worker representation – was ignored by over 75% of the articles surveyed.

So, in the light of this evidence, we wish to raise the delicate question of the responsibility of management intellectuals, especially of those who contribute to such journals. Is there a defence to be mounted for those of us who work in this discipline? Is there a reason not to address such issues directly in those journals held to represent excellence in our field?

We might begin by asking why the *Journal of Business Finance and Accounting* is being singled out for rarely if ever touching on the social and political issues of the day. Why should it? Would English literature or biology journals, for example, held up as instances of excellence in their respective fields, fare much better along these lines? Surely these fields would be open to the same criticism? This is a fairly weak defence, as it merely seeks to spread blame rather than accepting it. Moreover it may

well be wrong. Given the strong influence of feminism, post-colonialism, and deconstruction in English literature departments, or the considered analyses of the politics of the genome, of genetic engineering, and of socio-biology within contemporary biology, it is not inconceivable that these fields would perform well were a study like ours focused upon them. This, of course, is an empirical question. But in any case, given that management claims to be at the heart of almost everything, it is unclear how easy it is for its advocates to deploy a defence based on specialisation.

Perhaps some management scholars might instead argue that many global issues are not in fact that central to the daily lives of those who produce and consume management knowledge. African poverty and debt, Iraqi insurgencies, or the spread of AIDS and the persistence of domestic violence may concern us, and we may address them through other means, but these issues do not press day to day on our object of study - business and management in the global North, or in new regions of business growth like China and India. Here it is quite correct to add that even terrorism is remarkable by being an exceptional imposition on daily life in the countries that surround the North Atlantic. But the problem with this defence is that it is precisely the one against which Noam Chomsky wrote so persuasively, that of a certain wilful blindness to connections and complicity.

The premise of Chomsky's article was that the world in 1967 faced an arrogant US administration trying to impose its will on other parts of the world, and that an imperial economic vision underpinned the use of force. Intellectuals were needed to articulate this vision and as Chomsky documents, duly signed up. It seems almost

churlish to note that, at the time of writing, the UK government, among others, has been a willing partner in the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and in the design of a new organisation of society in these places. Chomsky's article focused on intellectuals who promoted 'freedom' and 'democracy' but left out any reference to the imperial delivery system. But now, given the rise of management, it should not be a surprise that this renewed worldwide project requires intellectuals of the market, of organisation, operations, and planning. In short it is not so much a question of whether these social and political issues are part of the daily lives of North Atlantic business and management intellectuals, as it is a fact that the products of North Atlantic business and management intellectuals are being forced into the daily lives of peoples across the globe. It is possible to add that everywhere around the globe one can find classes that launch their own internal invasions of markets, finance, operations, and planning, often in alliance with the North Atlantic, without altering the basic point that the knowledge produced in London Business School or Harvard is globally invasive.

A third defence would suggest that although there are undoubtedly examples of ideological zeal in some business and management scholarship, and some who have worked directly or indirectly for governments and corporations who export this zeal, most scholars produce technical contributions to knowledge that may be described as disinterested. Indeed at first glance this claim seems borne out by our research, with journals like the *European Journal of Operational Research*, or the *Journal of the Operational Research Society* valuing highly technical pieces rather than contributions evaluating the planning and operations of a military invasion in Afghanistan, or even a dam project in India.

Chomsky's article was inspired by a set of similar articles by Dwight McDonald (1970), at the end of World War Two, about the complicity of many intellectuals in the horrors of the 1930's in Ethiopia and Spain, as well as those a decade later, of the Nazis, of Hiroshima, of Dresden. Like McDonald, Chomsky asks how this could happen, and how especially it could be reconciled with the modern idea of the intellectual. His evidence ought to be as disturbing today as it was then. Because it was not only through a blind faith in the system, but through blindness to the system itself that much of this complicity operated. Certainly Chomsky's article is famous for the way it named the worst propagandists – those who knew they were lying but lied anyway. But what is less remembered are all the sections on the technocratic intellectuals of the day, those whose faith in their societies permitted them to work away on the technical issues of its operation, developing sciences of behaviour and techniques of persuasion.

Inspired by subsequent scholarly interrogation of disinterested scholarship in an interested society, from C Wright Mills to Edward Saïd, we might be forced to go further than a faith in the neutrality of the intellectual bureaucrat. As several of the questions in our survey hint, it is necessary to consider the possibility that the very constitution of objective knowledge requires certain kinds of exclusion; that to posit a norm requires the production of the abnormal; that to appeal to science requires the production of superstition; that to imagine the purity of academic inquiry requires the production of impurity. In other words, neutrality is political too.

Of course this will not be a surprising assertion for those who gather under the banner of 'Critical Management Studies'. This in itself is a form of specialisation, a

recognized interest group at the Academy of Management that covers ‘social issues’. Perhaps it is in CMS-friendly journals that one must look to see such responsibility at work. Unfortunately, despite the best intentions with which the Critical Management project was launched, the figures in our survey suggest otherwise. Alongside the study of the top journals, we also analysed five journals that are usually hospitable to those writing in the name of CMS, namely *Culture and Organization*, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting, Gender, Work and Organization*; *Consumption, Markets and Culture* and *Accounting, Organization and Society*. As with the top twenty journals, we also generated results for each of these journals along each of the ten questions. Whilst there were some improvements, the heightened engagement with social and political issues on the part of CMS was anything but overwhelming or comprehensive. For specific information, we would refer the reader to Appendix Three. It should be added, without any special opprobrium, that *Organisation*, the most influential of the critical management journals, and among the top twenty in the main study, did not fare remarkably well along any of the criteria assessed here.

The mixed record of Critical Management Studies in addressing pressing social and political issues suggests that this study is not primarily an indictment of the concept of scholarly excellence. Although some journals regarded as excellent fared especially poorly on the issue of responsibility, several critically oriented journals less valued in the Research Assessment Exercise also proved unremarkable, especially given their editorial policies. It follows that tinkering with such a system, adding more metrics, or more peer review, will do little to address the uncomfortable but fundamental issues raised by our study.

To summarise, we can imagine a wide variety of ways of thinking about 'responsibility' - whether in terms of its 'corporate social' variety, the writings of Buber, Levinas or Derrida, the enactments of the world social forums, or everyday senses of obligation and care. What they all share is the possibility of irresponsibility, a label that can be applied by self or other to suggest a failure to respond to others. The question that our survey seems to raise hinges on the link between silence and a lack of response to the troubles of the world, or (in more forthright terms) the link between complicity and a refusal to acknowledge that the products of our own labours are implicated in the production of the troubles of others. At the moment, management academics appear to want to claim power, but not responsibility, a position which, on the showing of this survey, clearly makes a virtue of myopia. Towards all that we have said here, we welcome responses.

Appendix One (The Questions and their Rationale)

Q1. Does the journal publish articles by scholars from a diversity of academic institutions?

This question is designed to recognise that much valuable academic work goes on among scholars not placed at the top research universities. The question also pays attention to the conditions of production in the university, insisting that academic work should not be artificially separated from its possibilities.

Yes = any university outside the Top 500 universities in the world list

No = any university inside the Top 500 universities in the world list.

Non-university affiliated authors score 'yes'.

Top 500 University List available at

<http://ed.sjtu.edu.cn/rank/2005/ARWU2005FullList2.pdf>

Ranking Methodology available at

<http://ed.sjtu.edu.cn/rank/2005/ARWU2005Methodology.htm>

Q2. Does the journal publish articles from scholars based in the developing world?

This question is designed to provide an indication of the commitments to scholarly fair trade and to measure the diversity of international voices in the various conditions

Countries in the 'Developing World' are of Low or Medium Human Development as measured by the United Nations Human Development Reports.

These lists are available at http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/rc_2005.cfm

The methodology for the compilation of these lists is available at

<http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/>

Based = National affiliation offered in the publication

Q3. Does the journal publish articles engaging feminist or gender studies perspectives?

This question is designed to foreground the centrality of feminist understandings of management and accounting knowledge to any claim to excellence in scholarship.

Engaging = Are feminist approaches mentioned in the title, abstract or conclusion section of the paper? Yes/No

Q4. Does the journal publish articles engaging queer theory and/or theories of sexuality?

This question is designed to foreground the centrality of gay/bi-sexual understandings of management and accounting knowledge to any claim to excellence in scholarship.

Engaging = Are these approaches mentioned in the title, abstract or conclusion section of the paper? Yes/No

Q5. Does the journal publish articles engaging postcolonial studies, critical race theory, and/or transnationalist migrant analysis?

This question refocuses management and accounting knowledge away from Eurocentrism and toward a global perspective

Engaging = Are these approaches mentioned in the title, abstract or conclusion section of the paper? Yes/No

Q6. Does the journal publish articles studying the relationship between business/corporate practice and war, violence and/or the displacement of populations?

This question is designed to value the contribution of indigenous, disadvantaged or underprivileged peoples to producing the relationship between economy and society.

Engaging = Are these approaches mentioned in the title, abstract or conclusion section of the paper? Yes/No

Q7. Does the journal publish articles directly concerned with the relationship of business to environmentalist, consumer and anti-corporate movements?

This question is designed to value the contribution of a whole range of corporate critics to producing the relationship between economy and society.

Directly concerned = Are these issues discussed and prioritised in the title, abstract or conclusion section of the paper? Yes/No

Q8. Does the journal publish articles directly concerned with the persistence of exploitation in the workplace and/or unsafe and dehumanizing business practices towards employees?

This question balances the profit interest in business with legal and humane obligations of business in the workplace.

Directly concerned = Are these issues discussed and prioritised in the title, abstract or conclusion section of the paper? Yes/No

Q9. Does the journal publish articles directly concerned with wage negotiations, the effort bargain, and the consequences of collective representation and/or workplace democracy?

This question is designed to consider at the level of the firm the consequences to employee living standards of the profit imperative

Directly concerned = Are these issues discussed and prioritised in the title, abstract or conclusion section of the paper? Yes/No

Q10. Does the journal publish articles directly concerned with business practice and its relationship with the (re)distribution of wealth?

The question is asked to draw attention to the connection domestically between social welfare and business environment, and globally between corporate control of resources, and national and local rights to the profits

Directly concerned = Are these issues discussed and prioritised in the title, abstract or conclusion section of the paper? Yes/No

Appendix Two (The Results)

Original Rank	JOURNAL TITLE	No. of Articles	QUESTION NUMBER																			
			1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10	
			TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%
1	Journal of Marketing Management	91	58	64%	4	4%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0	0	0%	17	19%	3	3%	2	2%	3	3%
2	Journal of Management Studies	145	49	34%	1	1%	4	3%	3	2%	3	2%	0	0%	44	30%	13	9%	47	32%	14	10%
3	Journal of the Operational Research Society	254	169	67%	33	13%	1	0%	0	0%	1	0%	10	4%	17	7%	1	0%	3	1%	5	2%
4	British Journal of Management	54	33	61%	2	4%	2	4%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	11	20%	0	0%	7	13%	1	2%
5	European Journal of Marketing	149	105	70%	8	5%	0	0%	0	0%	2	1%	0	0%	13	9%	5	3%	4	3%	6	4%
6	International Journal of Operations and Production Management	129	90	70%	9	7%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	13	10%	4	3%	17	13%	7	5%
7	British Journal of Industrial Relations	62	26	42%	1	2%	7	11%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	15	24%	13	21%	58	94%	11	18%
8	Human Relations	113	62	55%	1	1%	12	11%	6	5%	7	6%	4	4%	29	26%	28	25%	36	32%	12	11%
9	International Journal of Human Resource Management	154	85	55%	9	6%	8	5%	1	1%	2	1%	0	0%	27	18%	18	12%	77	50%	28	18%
10	Organization Studies	118	46	39%	4	3%	2	2%	1	1%	5	4%	6	5%	46	39%	20	17%	42	36%	18	15%
11	Journal of Business Finance and Accounting	98	52	53%	3	3%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	6	6%	0	0%	5	5%	16	16%
12	Human Resource Management Journal	41	19	46%	1	2%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	2	5%	10	24%	8	20%	16	39%	6	15%
13	Work, Employment and Society	64	36	56%	3	5%	20	31%	4	6%	5	8%	5	8%	9	14%	33	52%	52	81%	22	34%
14	European Journal of Operational Research	227	158	70%	23	10%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	1%	30	13%	2	1%	4	2%	21	9%
15	Industrial Relations Journal	64	30	47%	0	0%	9	14%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	1	2%	30	47%	52	81%	20	31%
16	Service Industries Journal	98	70	71%	9	9%	1	1%	1	1%	1	1%	0	0%	10	10%	2	2%	5	5%	6	6%
17	Long Range Planning	69	33	48%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	13	19%	1	1%	4	6%	1	1%
18	Applied Economics	245	161	66%	24	10%	0	0%	0	0%	2	1%	0	0%	27	11%	2	1%	26	11%	76	31%
19	Personnel Review	74	43	58%	2	3%	6	8%	0	0%	3	4%	0	0%	19	26%	11	15%	44	59%	11	15%
20	Organization	82	19	23%	0	0%	5	6%	2	2%	3	4%	6	7%	11	13%	29	35%	38	46%	10	12%
TOTAL (COUNTS, PERCENTAGES)		2331	1344	57.7%	138	5.9%	80	3.4%	18	0.8%	35	1.5%	37	1.6%	368	15.8%	223	9.6%	539	23.1%	294	12.6%

Appendix Three (Comparison between 'orthodox' and 'critical' journals)

CRITICAL JOURNAL TITLE	Number of Articles			QUESTION NUMBER																							
	2004	2003	TOT	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10					
				TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%	TOT	%				
Culture and Organization	21	19	40	19	48%	1	3%	6	15%	5	13%	6	15%	5	13%	11	28%	11	28%	12	30%	5	13%				
Critical Perspectives on Accounting	50	34	84	37	44%	1	1%	6	7%	0	0%	13	15%	8	10%	71	85%	7	8%	7	9%	48	57%				
Gender, Work and Organization	30	26	56	19	34%	0	0%	56	100%	8	14%	5	9%	3	5%	17	30%	29	52%	36	64%	11	20%				
Consumption, Markets and Culture	16	15	31	7	23%	0	0%	11	35%	2	6%	4	13%	5	16%	23	74%	4	13%	7	23%	16	52%				
Accounting, Organization and Society	34	27	61	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	3%	0	0%	0	0%	2	3%				
'CRITICAL' TOTAL			272	83	30.5%	2	0.7%	79	29.0%	15	5.5%	28	10.3%	21	7.7%	124	45.6%	51	18.8%	62	22.9%	82	30.1%				
'NORMAL' TOTAL			2331	1344	57.7%	138	5.9%	80	3.4%	18	0.8%	35	1.5%	37	1.6%	368	15.8%	223	9.6%	539	23.1%	294	12.6%				

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² The RAE is the British 'Research Assessment Exercise', an evaluation which is concerned with the perceived quality of publications amongst academic peers. It will be noted that what might be considered to be the most prestigious US management journals (i.e. *Academy of Management Review*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly* etc.) are not included in our list because British based academics are rarely published in them. However, our sample of journals is based on what was actually submitted to the 2001 RAE, not where people might like to publish.

³ The only exception is the *European Journal of Operational Research* which, out of concerns for the fact that this journal published many more articles during one year than all the other journals surveyed (with the exception of one) published during two. On account of this imbalance, the *European Journal of Operational Research* was analysed over one year as opposed to two.