Measure for measure? Navigating judgment and taboos in teaching and research

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Introduction to First Person Research

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The noun ''measure'' is of considerable semantic breadth. Through its definition as ''quantity,'' it has had immediate relevance to quantitative research in organization and management. However, it also holds many other meanings. For example, it connotes moderation (*in good measure*) as well as extent of an object (*in equal measure*) or of treatment (*in same measure*) (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2010). In this issue, we are interested in the intersection of measure with judgment. This nexus brings into play some ethical and practical implications for organizational teaching and research. ''Judgment,'' too, holds many meanings. Its roots in the English language are well over 700 years old and were grounded in religious and legal discourses of justice (*sit in judgment, day of judgment*). Subsequently, judgment came to stand for evaluation in formulating a decision (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2010). This particular meaning has had interdisciplinary relevance, including decision theory in management and organization (e.g. Arkes and Hammond, 1986; Hogarth, 1987). Our interest here is in ''judgment'' as a critical faculty of discernment. Judgment is core to what everyday academic work involves. Through it we assess our students and evaluate our research findings. It is judgment that makes us argue for and against certain organization and management concepts.

We return to our title. It invokes Shakespeare's play which draws on a biblical passage: ''with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.'' Here, ''measure'' as an instrument of capacity is used metaphorically to indicate that what you do unto others will be done unto you – or, what goes around comes around. This is a piece of wisdom that has often transcended time and place. To us, *in same measure* is not about retaliation and all about reflexivity. It involves judging or working with concepts and with people while dealing with ourselves using the same standard. For example, it is often easier for a person to accept that the world is not ''rational'' than it is to accept that – as part of that world – one, personally, is not ''rational.'' In this issue, we have two papers in which authors depict their journey through circumstances wherein they confronted the implications of measure for measure.

Steven Taylor's paper is about reciprocal negative judgments he shared with a student and how he navigated through this experience at the time, and in hindsight. The experience centered on teaching (and learning) ''reflective practice.'' Grounded in spiritual and philosophical traditions, reflective practice is increasingly popular in professional education. However, as Taylor illustrates, this particular educational experience poses its own

challenges for students and teachers alike. Specifically, if a teacher were to assume that s/he is ''fundamentally right'' and that any problem lies with the student, the resultant ''duel of negative judgments and arguments'' curbs reflective inquiry. The constructive alternative involves openness to the surprises brought about by genuine reflection.

The paper by Grisoni and Page considers the role of metaphor in making sense of the authors' collaborative inquiry process during a period of organizational change. It addresses the ''lip service'' paid to academic collaboration when the institutional and hierarchical pressures of an academic institution undermine the collaborative process. In the end, the struggles the authors had with their collaborative inquiry process in the context of an academic hierarchy raised doubts whether the benefits of such inquiry were worth the enormous emotional and intellectual costs. Some might argue that it became a taboo topic rooted in the notion of what goes around, comes around.

This paper also reveals how any metaphors we deploy to make sense of our experiences often come with their own normative evaluations and judgments. For example, traditionally the ''witch'' metaphor already brought judgment with it, as did the ''goddess'' metaphor. What makes this an especially interesting paper is how Grisoni and Page deploy them together to generate reflexive insights into their collaborative process.

The 20th century has witnessed a new deployment for ''judgment.'' Through *judgment call*, the pragmatic constraints on absolute judgment offered a loophole for situated decision making, bound by circumstances, actors and time. However, judgment calls can also favor premature closure over considered reflection. Exerting considerable force for such closure are institutions and institutional processes; these often tend to become self-sealing and unreflexive (see, for example, Masuch, 1985). In our view, this is precisely why First Person narratives are important. We approach First Person as a forum for engaging with taboo topics that, by virtue of being published and discussed, just might undermine the automatic replication of some dysfunctional (and at times destructive) processes in academic institutions. Our aim is to maintain a space for the pursuit of reflexivity.

References

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