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Introduction

Introduction to the Teaching & Learning Section

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Teaching & Learning Section Editor

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Management is a science. Management professors create knowledge about the field and transfer that knowledge to those who will put it into practice. This view of management offers some comfort to those who see chaos in the everyday ambiguity of organizational life. If there is a science of organizational behavior then there are rules for living within the discipline. Rules for science are explicit. The characteristics of good (i.e., scientific) research are:

1. *The goal is inference*. Scientific research is designed to make descriptive or explanatory *inferences* on the basis of empirical information about the world.
2. *The procedures are public*. Scientific research uses explicit, codified, and public methods to generate and analyze data whose reliability can therefore be assessed.
3. *The conclusions are uncertain*. By definition, inference is an imperfect process. Its goal is to use quantitative or qualitative data to learn about the world that produced them.
4. *The content is the method*. Finally, scientific research adheres to a set of rules of inference on which its validity depends. The content of "science" is primarily the methods and rules, not the subject matter, since we can use these methods to study virtually anything (Michael, 2002).

These rules exist to guide scientists through the confusion of everyday politics, conflicting agendas, and varying degrees of professional competence.

Having rules for good science is a good approach, but somehow management, like all other sciences, seems to vary in its prescriptive powers. That is, we do not always know to fix a problem or how to move the organization forward.

Maybe the problem is one of definition. If we assume management is a science then we think it must follow rules. However, it might be that management is an art and subject to a different notion of order. In the early 20th century, Mary Parker Follett defined management as "the art of getting things done through people." (Knowing the definition of management, 2010). This separated management from engineering and the other applied sciences and opened the door to the possibility that, like all art, management is "representational, expressive, and culturally specific" (Adajian, 2007).

How we reconcile the two ideas of management is the theme of the Teaching & Learning Section in this issue. In "Management as a

Contextual Practice: The Need to Blend Science, Skills and Practical Wisdom," Jon Billsberry and Andreas Birnik reframe this debate in the form of a test of the differences between management as a science, a practice of skills, or a matter of practice wisdom grown from experience. The authors tap into a wide store of literature in philosophy, social science, and management education to find the unifying theme of contextual practice. This is the idea that management is an activity "which both shapes and is shaped by the context in which it occurs." The authors explore this construct in terms of the practice of management and, to the point of the Teaching & Learning Section, the design of management education as an evolving field of study. Everything changes … including how we know what we know and how we can transfer the knowledge. Work your way through this challenging and thought-provoking article and see for yourself how it can open your mind to all sorts of possibilities for how we think about our courses and our research.

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