Continuing to be different

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We are fortunate in becoming the new joint Editors-in-Chief of *Management Learning* for several reasons: first, because it is an honour and privilege to serve the community of management learning scholars in this vitally important editorial capacity; second, because we take on these roles at a significant juncture for the journal, namely the publication milestone of volume 40 of *Management Learning,* and in particular issue 4 which looked back over the journal's distinguished history, and forward to the challenges and opportunities that the field of managerial and organizational learning faces. Issue 40(4) celebrated the occasion with a series of contributions from twenty-four of the field's founding and leading international scholars. The inception of our term of office is an appropriate point at which to reflect upon the issues raised by that distinguished group of contributors, and some of the implications of what they have said for the future direction of managerial and organizational learning.

Recent years have witnessed a focusing of attention amongst editors, authors, librarians, and promotion panels on impact factors. In so far as *Management Learning* is concerned, our Journal Citation Reports impact factor has shown steady and healthy growth. The 2008 two-year impact factor was above the psychologically-important threshold value of 1, and the 2008 five-year impact factor was 1.49—testament to the quality of the scholarship of *Management Learning*'s contributing authors, the journal's impact not only within its own field but in the wider sphere of management research and practice. The journal's appeal and broad influence has as much to do with the range of issues that *Management Learning*'s authors address (including topics as diverse as organizational learning, knowledge management, leadership, networked learning, gender, power, critical pedagogy, communities of practice, and coaching) as with the importance and relevance of what they have to say.

So while respecting and engaging with the significance of impact factors, our principal aim is to continue to promote a distinctive scholarship that combines a 'critical' edge with innovation, imagination, provocation, engagement, excellence and careful and thoughtful work. As Grey (2009) and McAulay and Sims (2009) remind us, journals such as *Management Learning* provide much-needed outlets for a freer, and at times iconoclastic, kind of writing which respects and promulgates a plurality of values and norms. The articles in the current issue, ranging from the application of MacIntyrian moral theory in organizational learning, to management as 'the work that dare not speak its name' are consistent with this tradition. Over the course of its history *Management*

Learning has witnessed many significant changes cogently summarized by Vince and Elkjaer (2009), and it is inevitable that tensions and paradoxes have arisen as the journal moved further away from its original purpose. Turnbull James and Denyer (2009: 363) argued that *Management Learning*'s progression from its early management education practitioner focus as *Management Education and Development* towards more 'scholarly, theoretical and critical approaches' has had a downside and incurred a cost: the decline in the number of practical, user-led, collaborative papers that address the current concerns of executive education and development. We echo Turnbull James and Denyer's plea for contributions that balance practical relevance and accessibility whilst embodying the theoretical rigour, innovative excellence, thought leadership and criticality that have come to distinguish *Management Learning* papers. Indeed the plea by Fox (2009) for ethnographic, vernacular, practice-based studies of working, knowing, and learning represents one direction in which a balance of ethno-methodological rigour and local practice-relevance might be achieved. Perhaps papers in *Management Learning* should aim to achieve a delicate balancing not only *for* both rigour and relevance, but also *against* uncritical practice and uncaring, potentially destructive, critique (see Gabriel, 2009).

As far as the specifics of submission to and publication in the journal are concerned:

(1) Notes for Contributors have been streamlined and there are a number of small but significant changes;

(2) *Management Learning*'s four 'Is' remain firmly in place, namely papers that are inclusive, innovative, international and integrative are much more likely to be published than those that fail to display these attributes. We can add a fifth 'I' to this list, as advocated by Antonacopoulou (2009): papers in *Management Learning* should be potentially impactful, which in Antonacopoulou's terms are papers characterized by being influential, memorable, practical, actionable, co-created and transformational;

(3) In terms of positioning, *Management Learning* will continue to complement related journals, such as *Academy of Management Learning and Education* and *Journal of Management Education* and also aspire to reflect a diversity of research traditions (including papers with 'more numbers'; see Perriton, 2009) as one of its strengths, and as a means of fostering dialogue as our field grows and matures, and forges new connections (see Li, Easterby-Smith and Bartunek, 2009);

(4) Our aim is to attract and publish the highest quality work which makes original, novel and significant contributions to the development of the field of management learning—work that dares to be different (Grey, 2009) but which is not uncritically critical (Gabriel, 2009);

(5) Submissions to *Management Learning* should not only evince absolute clarity and significance of contribution, but also be imbued with intellectual curiosity, inquiry and critique (in the widest sense of 'criticality') and taking cognisance, where appropriate, of the issues raised in Issue 40(4) – we warmly welcome manuscripts that are congruent with these aspirations;

(6) Finally, Sage have afforded the opportunity to *Management Learning* authors' for their work to reach its audience more efficiently and effectively through the OnlineFirst system. This is an innovation which we hope will be not only welcomed but fully utilized by readers of *Management Learning*.

We are fortunate to be members of a strong and very dedicated journal team of: Associate Editors, Dr Craig Pritchard (Massey University, New Zealand), Dr Davide Nicolini (University of Warwick, UK); Book Reviews Editor, Dr Carole Elliot (Lancaster University, UK); and Editorial

Assistant, Sarah Gundry. We are pleased to report that the *Management Learning* award of 'Reviewer of the Year 2009' goes to Dr Allan Macpherson (University of Liverpool) for the excellent reviewing work he has carried out on behalf of the editorial team. As editors we are acutely aware that the success of *Management Learning*, and indeed the development of the field itself, is utterly dependent upon the dedication, energy and commitment of manuscript reviewers. We extend our gratitude to *Management Learning*'s reviewers for their unstinting service to the journal and the field, and for their carefully-crafted and constructive reviews, so necessary to the development of all our work.

We look forward to continuing the *Management Learning* tradition of providing a space for scholars to engage with challenging and original ideas that compel us to think about learning and life in organizations in new ways. All that remains for us to do is to fulfil the most important task of this in-coming Editorial, and that is to express our sincerest thanks to Professors Bente Elkjaer (University of Aarhus) and Russ Vince (University of Bath) for the way in which they have taken *Management Learning* forward during their term of office. They have been models of professionalism and scholarship, and we will be satisfied indeed if, by the end of our term, we manage to emulate their achievements.

References

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