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Politics, Governance, and Leadership: What Can We Learn From the Academy of Management's Response to E013769?

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Politics, Governance, and Leadership: What Can We Learn From the Academy of Management's Response to EO13769?

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Abstract

Organization design seeks to balance potentially conflicting objectives while achieving a broader mission. EO13769 created a challenge for the president of the Academy of Management in leading through these conflicts, as President Anita McGahan describes: how to be true to her own moral values while leading an organization with well-established design constraints, and members with diverse opinions. This article shares the perspectives of 12 scholars on the lessons we can learn from Professor McGahan's leadership of a constraining organization through a challenging time.

Keywords

governance, organization design, constitutional democracy, accountability, ethical leadership

A rising tide of authoritarianism is washing over the worlds of politics and business. Fledgling democracies that arose after the collapse of the Soviet Union have in some cases slipped into a strongman form of governance centered on a powerful leader. Even well-established democratic institutions can be fragile in the face of widespread populist discontent, and leaders who promise decisive action may claim authority to flout venerable laws and norms. At the extreme, a strategy of “decisive action” can undermine the accountability of executives in a constitutional democracy.

In business, we see start-ups going public with governance structures that guarantee the founder's control in perpetuity, with limited options for checks and balances. Facebook's initial public offering (IPO) in 2012 awarded its founder and CEO majority voting control through a class of super-voting shares, giving Mark Zuckerberg the ability to select the board of directors that nominally oversees him. Dozens of tech companies followed a similar path, including LinkedIn, Zillow, Groupon, Zynga, Yelp, Kayak, Tableau, GoPro, Roku, Dropbox, Box, Qualtrics, and others. At Lyft and Zoom, the founders got 20 votes per share, while the public at large got just one vote per share. And at Snap, new shareholders received no voting rights at all. These founder-centric governance systems provide almost no mechanisms of accountability: what Zuckerberg wants, Zuckerberg gets. Indeed, under the current regime, Zuckerberg could sell Facebook to Vladimir Putin, and other stakeholders could do little to stop him.

At the same time that authoritarian forms of governance are spreading, the field of organization design is seeing a resurgence of interest. As the tools of design come to encompass information and communication technologies, those creating governance structures face a wide range of constitutional choices. Should our new technologies be used to give leaders more centralized panoptic control to implement their vision, or should they be used to create more democracy and more input from the grassroots? While tech companies are giving their leaders seemingly insurmountable levels of control, employees are banding together to demand a voice,

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from the kinds of government-sponsored projects their employer takes on to the treatment of temporary employees. What do we want out of our organizations: a nimble tool for leaders to pursue their vision, or a constitutional order that responds to the wants of its members?

The case of the Academy of Management's (AOM) response to EO13769 encapsulates the conflict between the constraints imposed by organization structure and the desire to respond to great challenges right away. AOM's long-standing "no political stands policy" (NPSP) created a clear constitutional limitation on the President's authority. Yet a global scholarly association cannot maintain its integrity in promoting free scholarly dialogue when some voices are systematically barred from being in the room. At the extreme, bans on participation create an existential threat to the very enterprise of scholarship.

Professor McGahan's (2019) piece demonstrates what is possible for the exercise of moral leadership within constitutional constraints. The responses collected within this article provide 11 different views on what this situation can teach us about democracy, leadership, collective values, and organizational design.

- Michel Anteby wonders whether the AOM might seek to be bolder now and to take on issues such as employment discrimination, even if they do not pose an obvious existential threat to the organization.
- Forrest Briscoe sees reason to expect that the issues raised by this incident are likely to become more common—after all, in a politically polarized world, existential threats are in the eye of the beholder.
- Dev Jennings notes that grassroots efforts at change are often more in keeping with activists' goals—and perhaps more effective—than top-down activism.
- Samina Karim describes the value of having a constitutional structure in place to constrain the activities of leaders, and how organizational structure can be a tool to ensure that the organization remains true to its mission.
- Aseem Kaul wonders how we might move beyond mere proclamations, which are often ineffectual, to creating real change and having real impact on policy.
- Sergio Lazzarini analyzes the dilemma that happens when structures intended to rein in leaders end up limiting beneficial changes, and sees this case as an effective instance of using formal processes to change the limiting structure.
- Banu Özkazanç-Pan and Paul Donnelly point out that leadership is not just the actions of a single person, but contains multitudes, and that behind the scenes of a formal change are the less visible tasks of building and maintaining an actor-network.
- Andreas Rasche analyzes the need for constraining governance structures to adapt, and calls for more research to help understand governance in the context of business–society relations.
- Anne Tsui describes the challenge of leading a normal organization during challenging times, and wonders if structures put in place long ago still make sense for an organization that is increasingly large, diverse, and global.
- Tom Wright argues that EO13769 was hardly an existential threat to the AOM, and suggests that changing the constitution in response was disproportionate and perhaps undemocratic itself.
- Finally, Todd Zenger points out the irony of the fact that those seeking "moral imagination" in the face of external challenges seem to implicitly endorse the kind of "rules be damned" approach that created the challenge in the first place.

As a group, these scholars encourage us to think about politics, governance, and leadership: What are the constraints imposed by a constitutional system, and how can a leader work with organizational structure to serve a mission even within these constraints?

Can We Be Bolder Now?

Michel Anteby

Professor McGahan's illuminating insider account of AOM's governance dynamics sheds welcomed light on the AOM's inner workings. The account also contextualizes a request that a colleague and I put forth to AOM's Board of Governors Ethics Committee in 2017. At the time, the request was motivated by a particular case in which an openly gay colleague had applied via AOM for a faculty job and got an offer, but was later prevented from accepting it due to some broader practices of discrimination that extended beyond AOM. Disturbed by such an outcome, and feeling this was not an isolated case, we approached AOM to inquire about its non-discrimination policy in job-postings. After several back-and-forth interactions and a formal request on our part, AOM now makes its policy more explicit: Employers need to pledge to "not discriminate based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or any basis proscribed by law."

This change is progress, but I still hope for a bolder moral stand. Being bolder might entail AOM strongly encouraging all employers not to discriminate even if government laws applicable to them permit it. Also, when such laws do apply, schools could be required to disclose them in their ads so select applicants can decide to opt out

and buffer themselves from the troubling above experience. But as McGahan (2017) reminds us, “discerning a moral stand from a political stand is of itself nearly impossible” and such a “boldness” might code “political” (p. 256). Her account did make me wonder how AOM’s old/new “no political stand policy” (NPSP) might have shaped/would change AOM’s stand on such an issue. Unbeknownst to me, the request we put forth on job-posting probably collided with the old NPSP. My frustration with not seeing AOM take a bolder stand might have been an artifact of its governance structure. So where does the revised NPSP leave us? I agree with McGahan (2019) that AOM emerged [morally] “stronger than it had been” but that there is “still much to do” (p. 259). The revision allows AOM’s President to issue a statement on behalf of AOM “when a public policy action threatens the existence, purpose, or functioning of the AOM as an organization” (McGahan, 2019, p. 256). The new NPSP offers a set of criteria to assess a threat and adds that actions that can threaten the existence, purpose or functioning of AOM as an organization arise from attacks on academic freedom, scholarly exchange, scholarly convening, and AOM scholarship itself. Would barring a subset of people from being hired constitute a threat under these rules? I am doubtful, but the new NPSP would at least allow for such a question to be discussed.

Remaining silent on a moral issue is in itself a moral stand. As I have written elsewhere, an ideology of non-ideology amounts to actively taking a stand. Silence benefits those already in power. My hope is that the revised NPSP will allow AOM to become more vocal on key issues, so that it embodies our highest aspirations and does not simply reflect the status quo.

Debate Is Healthy. Policy Exceptions Are Tricky. Disputes Will Continue

Forrest S. Briscoe

I read Professor McGahan’s article with great interest. For an open-system democratic organization, the fact that a societal event sparked such vigorous internal debate is, first and foremost, a sign of vitality. AOM’s membership is a microcosm of the wider society, so groups were bound to diverge in interpreting EO13769 and its relationship with the organization’s stated purpose of supporting a scientific community. The fact that some division and interest group (DIG) coalitions served as a “radical flank” to more moderate groups indicates the breadth of internal diversity. To state the obvious: governing in these conditions requires commitment to constitutional rules that underlie the democratic form of organization. McGahan and other AOM leaders appear to have kept that commitment, and communicated with members about the rationale for doing so.

That said, this same line of thinking suggests some skepticism about the new exception policy allowing political speech when AOM’s purpose is threatened. As students of organizational and institutional change know, virtually any event or issue can be framed to threaten (or support) a particular policy or purpose. For example, someone might argue that open national borders threaten the purpose of AOM because the concept of open national borders contribute to foreign theft of intellectual property, undermining the scientific community. The point is, it’s hard to imagine a policy exception that avoids opening the door for unintended uses.

Stepping back, these events may reflect a broader evolution in the values and interests of organizational members. In particular, although the AOM community has always aimed for a positive impact on society, there is more desire now to explicitly address society’s “grand challenges”—which are already politically polarized in the larger society. Hence, it seems likely that this type of dispute and contention will become more common in the Academy, for better or worse. Sounds like a great research site for an organizational theory dissertation.

Standing Up, With, or Apart?

P. Devereaux Jennings

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to former AOM President McGahan’s article. I had considered forgoing the option, just saying that “I cannot respond in this short time and in a single page, given the sophistication of her article and Professor Tsoukas’ piece to which it is responding.” But after reading her paper, I felt more compelled to write something about her efforts, in spite of the editorial constraints. I have chosen to comment on her leadership decisions concerning EO13769 from the thematic angle of “Business-Social Problems.” In 2017, I was the Organizations & Natural Environment (ONE) Division Chair, and for many years, I have been involved in the academic field (and my personal life) in various social problems (e.g., biodiversity, climate change, gender issues, and indigenous rights).

In my opinion, each issue domain and its associated social movements have their own bundle of ethical standards and leadership principles. In the case of biodiversity, it is not unusual for individuals to imbue the environment (animals, plants, material bodies) with natural rights and also to call for distributed leadership to represent the vast, complex ecosystem in the Anthropocene. In the case of gender issues, the move to self-identification has reconfigured the ethics of diversity and put a premium on authentic, group-specific leadership. In the indigenous rights area, there has been a long emphasis on respecting each group’s spiritual stand and territorial claims, along with the need to strengthen local governance and representation. The ban on travel for academics from particular countries crosses over

into social issue domains. Normally, in the face of such dominant, system-based power edicts, domain members, whether in or out of the AOM, would be mobilized to resist immediately, vocally, and even with protests that might cause the individuals difficulties. In my opinion, several academics whom I know believed that Professor McGahan would engage with the travel ban in this fashion.

However, I (and others) completely understand that she took a higher level, Lincoln-esque approach to addressing the social problem. She sought to work within the rules and not use the system for her own ends; because to do otherwise would both endorse the truth-bending, quasi-legal means used by the politicians who instituted the travel ban, and thus further erode the U.S. system of checks and balances that should have curtailed such nonsense. Lincoln was very unpopular in many circles during his day for following the principles of the U.S. Constitution and trying to offer legitimate means to southern states for staying in (or rejoining) the Union. I am sorry that Professor McGahan has had to face, directly or indirectly, some of that vitriol and hallway spills. Clearly, such annoyances should have been focused elsewhere, that is, on the sources and rationale for the ban.

I would add that I have not been one of the sources of annoyance or vitriol regarding her stance on the travel ban, although I did have some intense consultations with her about whether ONE could make statements regarding Environmental Protection Agency appointments and their impact on ONE research. Instead, in my case and in others that I've heard about, we found different, end-around methods of engaging with those individuals affected by the ban (e.g., Skyping, using second-party presenters, and meetings in nearby locales). In other words, we engaged in our own grassroots responses while trusting that the AOM system would figure out its position. Fortunately, the Academy is currently large and loose enough for many sorts of activities to occur, and we hope that future governance measures will not curtail grassroots efforts to respond. We recognize that this grassroots method is more in keeping with the social issues' view of ethics and leadership. Whether more active forms of mobilization will be endorsed by the AOM remains to be seen.

The Value of Organizational Structure

Samina Karim

The case narrative by Professor McGahan about her leadership of the AOM around the time of EO13769 reiterates the important role that organizational structure plays in decision making, coordination and control, and, ultimately, strategic change. These tasks, in and of themselves, are challenging—but what this case highlights so poignantly is how these challenges are exacerbated when trying to stay true to the organization's mission; a mission that, itself, is threatened by how these tasks are (or are not) implemented.

We learn from McGahan that the Academy is structured as having three primary business units of publishing, meetings, and membership; is highly decentralized with numerous divisions; and is led by an elected, volunteer, Board of Governors which includes the officers. So what is the purpose of all this structure? One role of structure is to form a decision hierarchy that coordinates and controls action among many contributors (Mintzberg, 1979). McGahan's case highlights the role of the Board to aggregate opinions and needs of members (that may otherwise remain unchanneled and lack cohesion) and then to democratically make decisions for the organization as a whole. As academics who study and teach management, surely we would not advise that a chairman of an organization make unilateral decisions and declarations without consulting the board.

Another role of structure is to enable the organization's strategy (or agenda) through procedures and processes of the organization (Chandler, 1962; Galbraith, 1973). In the case of the AOM non-profit corporation, these procedures and processes are outlined in the organization's Constitution. In this regard, the Constitution represents the organization; the bylaws are written and approved by Board members who are elected by the membership. Analogous to other incorporated hierarchical organizations, the structuring of a board requires that board members be responsible to stakeholders (i.e., the membership) as well as pursue duties (i.e., their agenda). If a leader circumvents the process laid out in the organization's Constitution, this not only breaks the trust of the membership that elected that individual to abide by the Constitution, but further, it makes the organization's purposefully designed structure insignificant and meaningless. McGahan's case narrative underscores her respect for both the AOM Constitution and the role of President that was entrusted to her by the Academy membership.

Personally, as a Bangladeshi-American Muslim and a member of the Academy, I am reassured knowing that our AOM leaders are conscientious, separating the identity of the organization from that of any one individual. It is by upholding the structural governance mechanisms that the leaders of the Academy (a) strengthen the organization for the future by developing processes for strategic change that will withstand leadership turnover, and (b) protect each of our freedom in scientific discourse.

How Can We Move From Speaking Out to Real Impact?

Aseem Kaul

Professor McGahan's case study of AOM's response to EO13769 offers important insights into the challenges faced by managers as their organizations increasingly come under moral scrutiny from activists and social movements. Faced with such pressures, the traditional response of many

organizations—that of taking no stand on political issues—is increasingly, and correctly, seen as inadequate. To stay silent in the face of injustice is a political act: a form of acquiescence that may serve to support and strengthen the status quo. Those of an organization's stakeholders who find themselves marginalized or voiceless do not experience silence as neutrality, they experience it as betrayal. It is only natural, then, that they should demand more from their leaders, ask for greater accountability, and expect stronger expressions of support.

If silence in the face of salient social or political issues is not an option, however, then we are left with the formidable problem—familiar to us from Arrow's (1951) seminal work—of aggregating individual values and preferences up to a collective organizational choice. There are two challenges here. The first is ensuring due process. What mechanisms shall we design to determine when it is appropriate for an organization to take a stand, and what that stand should be? What structures and safeguards must we put in place to ensure that our efforts to support some members of an organization do not, paradoxically, end up stifling others or increasing intra-organizational polarization? The second challenge is delivering real impact. How do we move past symbolic gestures to substantial initiatives? How do we design actions that do not simply channel our outrage or express our point of view, but enable meaningful social change and deliver real support to those affected in an engaged and sustainable way? It seems to me that these questions represent an important and exciting research agenda for scholars of organization going forward. Once we acknowledge that private organizations must engage with the public issues of their day—both as a moral imperative and as a pragmatic necessity—we must start to examine how such engagement is best achieved. And what better way to start that exploration than by looking inward, as McGahan does here—investigating and evaluating, as researchers, our choices as organizational citizens.

The Trade-Offs of Institutional Restraints

Sergio Lazzarini

In this comment, I draw from theories of economic organization and organizational design. Professor McGahan's decision to follow the constitutional provisions of the AOM is an example of commitment to rules. Institutional theorists have long argued that constitutions exist as a constraint on the power of the sovereign. At the organizational level, internal rules can also limit the ability of managers to use their authority to implement policies based on their personal beliefs, ideologies, and goals (Miller, 1992; North & Weingast, 1989).

However, inflexible rules may constrain welfare-enhancing changes. In this context, managers may selectively

intervene by deviating from rules as long as there are expected gains. The limits of selective intervention, however, are well known. Even if the proposed interventions aim at some perceived common good, in other occasions managers may ignore or alter existing rules to promote their own self-interest or the interests of their organizational coalition (Foss, 2003; Williamson, 1985).

For this reason, written constitutions often indicate formal processes through which managers can propose refinements or modifications of existing provisions—processes that often require the participation of multiple stakeholders to avoid unilateral ruling. McGahan essentially followed this path when she engaged the formal governance structure of the AOM and received input from a task force with diverse members. Eventually, a formal condemnation of the immigration policy was issued, while preserving the credibility of the AOM Constitution as a mechanism to constrain discretionary interventions by the managers in office.

Leading in Turbulent Times: On the Value of Translation Work

Banu Özkazanç-Pan and Paul Donnelly

To give some context, we were co-chairs elect of the CMS (Critical Management Studies) Division when EO13769 exploded onto the AOM radar, something we knew would test our leadership and that of the Academy. Reflecting on the process as it unfolded, and over time, we are reminded that life is messy and experience is inexact, so doing leadership is a messy experience—Professor McGahan's recollection of events gives some insight into such messiness and the ways our own politics may clash with organizational policies. Leading as a tempered radical was met with skepticism, anger, and even rebuke. Yet leadership is never quite as straightforward as the literature might seem to suggest; rather, it involves lots of translation work to enroll actors and align interests to arrive at a resolution.¹

Such work is both contingent—the actor-network could fall asunder at any time should the interests of any actors diverge—and emergent—the actor-network did not appear ready formed, as though it always already existed. Rather, building and maintaining the actor-network that eventually realized the change in AOM policy involved much invisible translation work to enroll actors through aligning interests in favor of the change, while ensuring AOM itself did not, to some degree, fall asunder. And tempering one's actions and words is a kind of translation that allows the leader to speak to various and divergent constituents.

In keeping with the practice turn, both Professor McGahan's and our experience point to the participation of many people in the production and reproduction of leadership. Not only that but many experiences illustrate that leadership was never really located in the body of one person.

Rather, it was distributed and collective, and emerged through a process of intermediary work—between members and division leaders, between division leaders and academy leaders, between members and academy leaders, and so on—where we were building a common understanding of what was happening and how best to move forward. Different interests can be at play, making it difficult to reconcile different views into a unified one. Yet pluralism is the hallmark of representative organizations and, in this spirit, we believe these events have made the Academy better, albeit we advocate for practicing an ethic of care in our interactions with one another into the future.

Adaptive Governance and Business–Society Relations

Andreas Rasche

Professor McGahan's analysis shows the need to study situations in which organizational governance and personal beliefs are not aligned (and maybe cannot be aligned easily). Her reflections demonstrate the relevance of such situations for research associations. But, it also leads me to think in new ways about the relationship between organizational governance and leadership, particularly in the context of business–society interactions. Such interactions often produce situations in which individual leadership is challenged by outdated governance principles. I am reminded of the situation which Royal Dutch Shell faced in 1995. The company was charged with complicity in human rights abuses performed by the Nigerian government. Shell's actions at the time were restricted by its "Statement of General Business Principles" committing the company to non-involvement in politics. Later on, the company revised the non-involvement principle and added provisions on human rights (Herckstroter, 1996).

What do we do if outdated governance principles clash with leaders' personal beliefs? And how do we deal with contradictory expectations in a situation where leaders have to speak on behalf of the organization? I have no ready-made answer to these questions. The literature discussing corporate governance, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and leadership also has little to say about such situations. We therefore need to study the links between organizational governance, leadership behavior, and contradictory expectations in more detail. Such research can reach in many directions. Here, I want to highlight one essential underlying issue: the need to reflect on the purpose of organizational governance. Too often, scholars and practitioners understand governance in an instrumental way. We detect a problem, isolate it, and then fix it. McGahan's reflections show that such thinking is unlikely to work. Dilemmas that appear at the intersection of governance and leadership can only be resolved (a) if we adopt a deliberative approach to governance and discuss contradictions in an open and frank (but also mutually respectful) way

with stakeholders and (b) if we remain open for such deliberations to feed into "adaptive governance," so that relevant principles are frequently reviewed, revised, and updated.

Responsible Leadership in Extraordinary Times

Anne S. Tsui

EO13769 put the leadership of the AOM to a true test. What should the leader do when an institutional rule prevents the leader from exercising her agency on a matter that she truly believes to have threatened the core mission of an institution: freedom in scholarship among members of a global organization? The "no taking stands" rule emerged many years ago. Driven by the desire to not take sides among a membership with diverse views and the lack of consensus on answers to management issues, the boards over the years have stood firm on this "take no stands" rule. Some past presidents have tried to change it, wanting AOM to influence public policies regarding labor and income issues, corporate governance, and scientific activities, to no avail. However, rules are made for normal times. January 2017 was not a normal time. With her deep sense of moral responsibility and conviction, Professor McGahan persisted and succeeded in revising this iron rule, enabling the president succeeding her to issue a letter on behalf of AOM to condemn EO13769. McGahan is an exemplar of responsible leadership in extraordinary times.

This case, when put in the context of the history of AOM, reveals the power of a collective ethos that "no action" is the "best action" when it comes to issues that could not possibly have a consensual view or when no action may be the fairest because it does not favor one group or one voice over another. This case is a direct challenge of this collective ethos. I echo McGahan's (2019) call that "There is still much more to do to strengthen the AOM" (p. 260), beginning with a deep reflection of whether some long-held tradition is still serving its membership in the complex and dynamic world of the 21st century, and an evaluation of whether the structure created many years ago (as specified in the AOM bylaws) is still appropriate to lead the extremely diverse global membership toward a common aspiration of inspiring and enabling a better world through its scholarship and teaching. There is much to learn from this case about responsible leadership at the individual leader level, the board levels, and the relationship between the two. The case inspires more studies of responsible boards and responsible leadership in both normal and extraordinary times. We live in extraordinary times.

Character Counts

Thomas A. Wright

Using the lens of strength of character, Professor McGahan's initial decision to follow the Academy's Constitution

highlighted her character strengths of critical-thinking and courage. While I respect her right to advocate for change to the Constitution, it was hurried through without consideration of all the facts and full membership involvement. EO13769 was not an abhorrent act that threatened the purpose of the AOM. Based more on disdain for Donald Trump, many failed to distinguish legitimate attacks on science from their personal politics.

The conversations after President Trump's election were heated, including at the Board of Governors meeting. On a personal note, the then-President of my Faculty Senate sent out an email and blogs encouraging support for a safe "space" for students to "commune" following Trump's "terrifying" election. Is this an inclusive protocol for those with diverse opinions?

The ban was presented as anti-Muslim. However, the seven countries constitute well less than 15% of the world Muslim population. The primary reason for inclusion can be found in the State Sponsors of Terrorism designation. The U.S. State Department initiated this designation in 1979 during the Carter presidency. Initially, the list consisted of Libya, Iraq, South Yemen, and Syria. Iran and Sudan were added later. Today, al-Shabaab terrorists target highly vulnerable Christian converts in Somalia with violence, even death. Should the AOM become involved?

The ban was presented as a threat to the very existence of the AOM. However, there was never a mention of how many of the AOM's 19,000+ members this ban would directly impact. There are three active (plus one emeritus) members from the seven countries. While President McGahan demonstrated strength of character, the membership is best served with a policy that nobody, including the AOM President, can represent their personal views as those of our organization.

Moral Leadership, Moral Imagination, and Organizational Change

Todd Zenger

The response of the AOM leadership to EO13769 issued on January 27, 2017, provides a fascinating case study in moral leadership, complete with the central ingredient in any great case study: clear controversy about how to optimally proceed. The narrative of the surrounding events, decisions, and processes that Professor McGahan herein provides as well as the critique of these actions by Tsoukas (2018) are not only a fascinating read but in them lie starkly contrasting descriptions of two alternative paths. Professor McGahan describes and justifies the path taken. Professor Tsoukas provides a critique of that path and suggests an alternative.

The Tsoukas critique is that the Academy's leadership failed to exercise "moral imagination" in response to the travel ban, viewing their bylaws and constitution through a rules-focused "bureaucratic frame," rather than merely

viewing their "rules-as-reminders" (Tsoukas, 2018, p. 7). Of course, there is tremendous irony in this critique. After all, the executive order that prompted this moral dilemma for the AOM's leadership was precipitated by a leader who, in pursuit of a "moral agenda" that the vast majority of AOM membership presumably viewed as abhorrent, exercised precisely such "moral imagination," viewing U.S. laws not as rules, but rather as "reminders," at best.

Rules, laws, and constitutions exist to reign in leaders' moral creativity and agency, in hopes of constraining moral abuse. But this may come at the cost of latitude for moral action. Institutions must grapple with how to calibrate this balance. Tsoukas (2018) notes that the American Philosophical Association and the American Psychological Association both quickly condemned EO13769, implying that the AOM leadership should have done likewise. But, what goes unnoted is that these organizations had different bylaws and constitutions than the AOM. The American Psychological Association actively engages in political lobbying and exercising its voice on political matters is not only clearly permitted by its bylaws but is a central part of its mission. The American Philosophical Association, while not as active in advocacy, has a pattern of issuing statements on a whole host of issues, some political. The leadership responses of these organizations did not require violating their bylaws, so they faced no real dilemma.

What McGahan (2019) and Tsoukas (2018) both agree upon is a need for organizational change at the moment the executive order was issued. One advocates moral imagination—interpreting rules as reminders, so as to enable a quick and timely response to the crisis. The other chooses a path of using the crisis to precipitate a change in rules that permits greater moral voice. Tsoukas (2018) concludes that the eventual shift in AOM policy is an "implicit admission that its initial reaction to the travel ban was inadequate" (p. 2). Certainly, any decision to change is an implicit admission of a need for change. But, the question at hand here is, What is the optimal path for enabling change? Unfortunately, we lack the luxury of observing counterfactual choice. We cannot observe what might have ensued had the AOM President immediately issued a formal AOM condemnation of the executive order, rather than merely posting a personal one. It may have precipitated a leadership crisis that prompted a further reinforcement of existing rules constraining all political voice, or it may have precipitated an accelerated path to the institution's current changed state, as well as a prompt capacity for voice in a moment of crisis. But, such uncertainty is what makes this such a wonderful case study in moral leadership.

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Note

1. For example, separate to our engagement as an executive with Professor McGahan on behalf of our division's members, there was also grassroots activity (through social media and a non-AOM [Academy of Management] listserv) that led to some members communicating directly with AOM leaders.

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