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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

Business schools and academics are under attack. Their methods, their approaches, and even their fundamental contributions are being challenged. To these issues hard questions are being asked: What is the value of an MBA degree (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002)? What do their highly regimented curricula have to do with the real world (Mintzberg, 2004)? Do statistically sophisticated yet narrowly focused research projects offer meaningful guidelines for businesses (Barley, 2006)? Does management scholarship speak to the concerns of managers (Cummings, 2003)? Does management theory connect with management reality (Goshal, 2005)? Do academics make a difference (Hambrick, 1994; Kessler, 2006)?

The practical value of the field of management, and more specifically of its theoretical models and academic literature, is not the subject of this article. What is in question is the translation of its value and its portability from highly defined technical research domains and journalese to the actual practice of management. There is a widespread and vocal stream of thought that laments the gap between academic learning and practical doing. Only a small sample goes beyond critique to offer suggestions on how to bridge this gap, yet for the most part these works are conceptual in nature. Scarcely any show how the gap can be clearly, concretely, and systematically bridged. This is our challenge. This is our focus.

A strategic initiative of the Eastern Academy of Management (EAM) is to better “make a difference” (Kessler, 2006). This follows from the premise that our collective knowledge is underapplied and there exists significant opportunity to help shape and guide management and managers as they face the challenges of the 21st century. The objective is long standing in the academic community but extremely elusive. Over a decade ago, the Academy of Management President told its membership,

“Colleagues, if we believe highly in what we do, if we believe in the significance of advanced thinking and research on management, then it is time we showed it. We must recognize that our responsibility is not to ourselves, but rather to the institutions around the world that are in dire need of improved management, as well as to those individuals who seek to be the most effective managers they possibly can be. It is time for us to break out of our closed loop. It is time for us to matter.” (Hambrick, 1994).

Notwithstanding this appeal for action, just a few years back in our affiliated organization's Conference Call it was similarly lamented that,

“Academy members...have been far less successful, however, in making sure that our knowledge is applied. Much of our knowledge fails to cross the gap between research and practice. Consequently, few practitioners read our research or appreciate its practical value” (Cummings, 2003).

This is unacceptable to the EAM given its mission and membership potential. To address this issue we are launching the EAM White Paper Series (EAM-WP) that will speak to critical management issues in a way that is useful to managers.

As 2005-2006 EAM President, I conceptualized and commissioned the EAM White Paper Series to apply important scholarly areas to critical issues of business management. Subsequently the EAM-WPs are formatted and written in a practitioner-friendly manner and are structured in the following manner: (1) Past—Key ideas and fundamental insights of the field; (2) Present—Best practices of companies leveraging these ideas and insights; (3) Future—Forecasts of trends, directions, and developments; and (4) Actions—What specifically managers should do with the above information. White papers will be published in *Organization Management Journal*. In addition, executive summaries will be distributed to managers and circulated among practitioner- and press-related outlets. I have the honor of editing the first offering of this series. Subsequent editions will be edited by current EAM president Shanthi Gopalakrishnan and president-elect Ed Christensen. OMJ outgoing editor Jeanie Forray and incoming editor Bill Ferris have committed to supporting this project. Former EAM Outstanding Paper winner Elizabeth Hamilton has offered her services in reaching out to practitioners. Together this team is poised to help the EAM-WP Series make a real difference.

This inaugural volume addresses three of the most pressing issues facing managers today. First, given the expanding global and demographic complexity in today's business arena, managers must be able to leverage diversity in organizations. Indeed diversity management is a critical contributor to effective decision making, creativity and innovation, business policy formulation, marketing, and human resource management...if you do it right. Second, classrooms and boardrooms alike have been shaken by the discovery that a set of ubiquitously required but often poorly applied competencies effects managerial and leader performance. The development and leveraging of Emotional and Social Intelligence has been shown to make a genuine contribution to personal and organizational effectiveness...if you do it right. Third, amidst business headlines replete with tales of poor leadership and declining morale, we see more than ever that empowering others in a mutually reinforcing manner is tantamount to organizational success. Regrettably empowerment has come to be seen by many as an empty buzzword, but its benefits are very real and its execution can differentiate successful managers from the also-rans...if you do it right.

It is my pleasure to present the contributions for Volume One of the EAM-WP Series:

Our first EAM-WP is entitled "Leveraging Diversity in Organizations" and is authored by Alison Konrad. Alison is a fellow and past president of the Eastern Academy of Management, editor-in-chief of Group and Organization Management, former chair of the Gender and Diversity Division of the Academy of Management, and editor of the recently published *Cases in Gender and Diversity in Organizations* (2006). This EAM-WP helps us understand, apply, develop, and leverage workplace diversity, defined as the set of individual, group, and cultural differences that people bring to the organization. Managing diversity well is not an option or luxury; it is a requirement of any organization seeking success in the modern workplace. Organizations are more diverse then ever across a variety of dimensions—e.g., gender, racial and ethnic, culture and religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, and age. Moreover population and demographic

trends look to push the issue even further up the corporate agenda. This burgeoning diversity enriches organizational contexts and offers management practitioners great opportunity, yet Konrad aptly describes how and why so many well-intended diversity initiatives fail. Central to her arguments are the presence of psychological and organizational barriers such as stereotypes and bias as well as outmoded systems and cultures. Konrad then systematically presents a series of the best practices to overcome these barriers which, if implemented, would help create effective multicultural organizations that provide employees with the flexibility to bring their entire set of identities to work and be put into practice. Managers will find in this article many well-conceived, actionable suggestions for leveraging diversity and achieving this absolutely critical objective.

Our second EAM-WP is entitled “Fostering Emotional and Social Intelligence in Organizations” and is authored by Craig Seal, Richard Boyatzis, and James Bailey. Craig is a regular EAM attendee and fast-rising scholar; Richard is one of the world’s most renowned experts on ESI and the author of several books, including the recent best seller *Resonant Leadership: Renewing Yourself and Connecting to Others through Mindfulness, Hope and Compassion* (2005); James has served as coordinator of the EAM conference’s last several keynote panels, is editor of the *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, and coeditor of the forthcoming *International Encyclopedia of Organizational Studies* (2007). This EAM-WP helps us understand, apply, develop, and leverage emotional and social intelligence, defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and use emotional information about oneself (EI) or others (SI) that leads to or causes effective or superior performance. A growing body of evidence points squarely at ESI as a critical factor underlying individual and organizational achievement, with superior ESI competencies linked to a plethora of bottom-line metrics. The authors provide a compelling case for ESI along with a set of examples demonstrating its positive effects in a broad array of organizational settings. Seal, Boyatzis, and Bailey then present a process for developing these competencies grounded in Intentional Change Theory. Managers will ignore this article only at their peril. Those interested in leadership development, career advancement, and positive organizational change will find herein a wealth of insightful observations and guiding principles.

Our third EAM-WP is entitled “Empowered Leadership in Organizations” and is authored by Gary Yukl and Wendy Becker. Gary has been involved in the Eastern Academy of Management over a long period of time and is the author of many books on this focal area, including the highly regarded *Leadership in Organizations* (2001) now in its sixth edition; Wendy is also an EAM’er and an experienced manager in the field of industrial and organizational psychology with an expertise in high performance work systems. This EAM-WP helps us understand, apply, develop, and leverage psychological empowerment, defined as the perception that workers can help determine their own work roles, accomplish meaningful work, and influence important decisions. As the authors show, empowerment is linked with increased work commitment, better decisions, improved quality, more innovation, and increased job satisfaction. It can be achieved by the proper orientation of leaders and supportive infrastructure to foster employees’ sense of meaningfulness, competence, choice, and impact. Yukl and Becker clearly show the conditions that differentiate successful from unsuccessful empowerment approaches and provide numerous easy to follow steps for helping managers develop effective programs. Among these are encouraging participation, deciding how and what to delegate, and implementing behavioral guidelines for empowering. For those managers interested in getting beyond the hype and

hoopla surrounding empowerment and looking to create workable interventions this article is a must read.

Together these three contributions highlight some of the most cutting-edge challenges in the modern workplace—leveraging diversity, developing emotional and social competencies, and empowering leadership. Together they explore their essential models for business success, demonstrate their effective use in real organizations, anticipate their future trends and developments, and provide specific actions for their implementation. Together they comprise the inaugural volume of the EAM White Paper Series to help bridge the gap between knowing and doing by applying management theory to practice.

Eric H. Kessler
Special Issue Editor

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