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Developing the Scholar-Practitioner

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Developing the Scholar-Practitioner

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Introduction

There is a growing interest in the notion of the scholarship of practice and with it that of the scholar-practitioner. Scholar-practitioners are not merely practitioners who do research but rather that they integrate scholarship in their practice and generate actionable knowledge, that is, knowledge that is robust for scholars and actionable for practitioners. In this mode they engage as reflective practitioners, manager-researchers, practitioner-researchers, i.e. who engage in a science of action and who produce useful research. Scholar-practitioners, while not always referred to as such, have existed in medicine for a long time and may be found in fields, such as educational administration, law and other professions. One may also catch it in acting and in actor-director context where eminent practitioners demonstrate their skills and the underlying theory-in use in master classes.

The situation in which scholar-practitioners engage in the scholarship of practice in their own organizational systems has not received much attention. Implicit in such engagement is that scholar-practitioners do not learn as detached observers but rather engage as actors in the management and change of their organizational systems

and that such inquiry is integrally linked to action. The paper is structured as followed. First, I introduce the notion of being a scholar-practitioner as pursuing practical knowing. Second, I explore how the work of the scholar-practitioner may be understood in terms of an integrated framework of first, second and third person practice. Third, I point to three quality requirements. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications for theory, practice, and for the education and development of scholar-practitioners.

Practical Knowing

The world of the scholar-practitioner is a world of practical knowing and action. Practical knowing's interests and concerns are human living and the successful performance of daily tasks and discovering immediate solutions that work. Practical knowing has its own particular characteristics that contrast with those of scientific knowing. Practical knowing varies from situation to situation in that what is familiar and works in one setting may not be familiar or work in another. Accordingly, practical knowing is always incomplete and can only be completed by attending to figuring out what is needed in a situation in which one is at a given time. Once that situation has passed, then that practical knowledge reverts to its incompleteness. As no two situations are identical scholar-practitioners reason, reflect and judge in a practical pattern of knowing in order to move from one setting to another, grasping what modifications are needed and deciding what behavior is appropriate. The world of the scholar-practitioner is a world of practical knowing and action that builds on the past, takes place in the present and seeks to

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shape the future.

Managers do not learn as detached observers but rather engage as actors in the management of their systems and that inquiry is integrally linked to action. After all management is an action-oriented trade. As insiders in their own organizations, managers are close to the situations and to the people engaged in them and are part of what takes placed. Accordingly they need methods and tools to enable them to both engage with and make sense of what goes on inside them as they work to deal with what goes on around them. Evered and Louis refer to such the challenges of inquiring from inside organizations as 'groping in the dark' into the hidden organizational realities around them, in many directions simultaneously as a 'multisensory holistic immersion' and as 'messy, iterative groping'. The question arises as to how the field of management learning and education can prepare and enable managers to inquire into what Evered and Louis refer to as 'the blooming buzzing confusion' of their own organizational

systems.

The context of insider scholar-practitioners is the strategic and operational setting that organizational members confront in their working lives. Issues of organizational concern, such as systems improvement, organizational learning, the management of change, the 'red and hot' issues and so on are suitable subjects for insider inquiry by scholar-practitioners, since (a) they are real events which must be managed in real time, (b) they provide opportunities for both effective action and learning, and (c) they can contribute to the development of actionable knowledge that is grounded in what really goes on in organizations.

Managers do reflect in-action but they typically don't reflect on their reflection in-action. For knowledge to be realized, first, mangers need to attend to how they attend to experience and what gives them curiosity, delight, anxiety and so on. Secondly, they need to advert to their intelligence, what it is that they do not understand yet, the dissatisfaction with current explanations, the puzzled search for new understanding, the release when they receive insights and their efforts to express what it is that they have understood. Thirdly, they need to attend to their reasonableness, whether their understanding fits the evidence, whether it is coherent or true, whether something will work or not. Finally, they need to attend to the responsibilities of their action. They can move from one question to another in a conscious and dynamic manner. Each process engages them in self-reflection (first person), collaboration with others (second person) and consolidated learning (third person).

First, Second and Third Person Practice

Working in this manner engages scholar-practitioner in three forms of engagement or practice. These are often framed as first-, second- and third-person inquiry and practice. These three inquiries and practices capture how an individual's inquiry and learning is implemented in collaboration with others and both then lead to an articulation of learning that can be brought to other settings.

First person inquiry-practice is typically characterized as the forms of inquiry and practice that develops the ability of the individual to foster an inquiring approach in his or her own life. It fosters engaging in self-learning in action, learning to reflect in deep inquiry about themselves, their assumptions, their practices, how they grapple with their understanding of their organizations.

As insider inquiry by scholar-practitioners takes place in the present tense, reflexivity plays a central role. To be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment. Reflexivity becomes a continuing mode of self- analysis and political awareness. As their organizational interventions unfold, managers may develop reflexive inquiry into their own values, assumptions and behaviors and into hidden take-for-granted assumptions that guide behavior in the organization. This is the desire to lead change in one's own organization requires a combination of self-reflection with vulnerability, realistic expectations, tolerance, humility, self-

giving, self-containment and an ability to learn. Therefore, first person reflexivity is an essential element for scholar-practitioners engaging in insider inquiry.

Second person inquiry-practice addresses the ability to build collaborative relationships so as to inquire into and work with others on issues of mutual concern, through face-to-face dialogue, conversation and joint action. It occurs as managers lead and collaborate with multiple stakeholders, for example, with their management teams, project teams, external organization development and change consultants and so on. Such conversations, therefore, need to be reflective and they require participants to take a higher viewpoint, seeking insights into the whole situation rather than the constituent parts and into the forms of conversation required in order that learning may take place.

Third person inquiry-practice aims at generalizing or extending the learning to other settings or audiences and in effect seeking to articulate what is actionable knowledge. In summary, the work of scholar-practitioners occurs in the present tense as they labor to change their organizations seeking to be successful in the change endeavors and to generate actionable knowledge involves three interdependent processes; their learning about self through the action, their collaborative work with others and the generation of learning that is robust for scholars and useful for practice.

Insider scholar-practitioners' third person practice flows from the work at first- and second-person and constitutes the contribution that the research makes to an impersonal audience through dissemination of robust and actionable knowledge. Here, the challenge is to confront the general bias that may exist between those who opt for robust theory to the exclusion of relevance or action and those who seek *actionability* without rigor. The integration of first- second- and third-person practice provides the basis for rigor and quality by being rigorous, reflective and relevant.

Quality Requirements

Pasmore, Woodman and Simmons postulate that research needs to be *rigorous, reflective* and *relevant*. Under *rigorous*, they group: data-driven, multiple methodologies, reliability across settings, co-evaluation, causality, underlying mechanisms and *publishability*. Under *reflective* they group: historical impact, referential, co-interpretation, community of practice, collection and repeated application. Under *relevant* they group: practical, codetermined, re-applicable, teachable, face-valid, interesting, true significance and specific. This chapter is proposing that these three quality standards of being rigorous, reflective and relevant provide a useful and critical benchmark for both undertaking and assessing insider inquiry by scholar-practitioners.

First, second and third person inquiry and practice may demonstrate being rigorous, reflective and relevant. Being rigorous, reflective and relevant in first person practice involves attention to experience and to how experience is processed and understood. Scholar-practitioners may not attend to their experience and may ignore what is disturbing or uncomfortable.

Their interpretations of events may be superficial, inaccurate and biased. Their judgments may be flawed. They may act on untested inferences and attributions. They may have unconscious fears which censor, block or divert questioning. As members of groups they can be blind to the limitations of their culture, race, gender and how power operates. Yet they can learn and can discover their mistakes. They can inquire into the sources of their misunderstandings, biases, inferences, prejudices, fears, anxieties and false judgments, how they subvert the inquiry process by ignoring awkward questions or not attending to all the data or jumping to conclusions. They can gain insight into these blocks to knowing by enacting the general empirical method, through pursuing a desire to know what is, rather than what they want to be. The act of judgment enables critical reflection on insights and so enables distinctions between what they affirm by judgment and what are assumptions, emotional reasoning, wild claims and jumping to conclusions.

Being rigorous, reflective and relevant in second person practice focus on the quality of collaborative inquiry and action with colleagues and relevant others. Schein refers to two ways of talking together. There is the traditional discussion mode where the emphasis is on advocacy, competing and convincing. Here the dialectic of exploring opposites predominates through debate. Secondly, there is the mode of dialogue which is marked by suspending one's own presuppositions and engaging in internal listening, accepting differences and building mutual trust. This involves revealing feelings, building common ground and challenging one's own assumptions and learning to think and feel

that the whole group may build new and shared assumptions. In Schein's view, if new organizational responses are needed to change cultural assumptions or to learn across sub-cultural boundaries, the second mode of dialogue will be most important. This is because organizational learning involves going beyond the cultural status quo. Being rigorous, reflective and relevant in third person practice captures how actionable knowledge is generated through demonstration of how the inquiry was data-driven, explored, tested and evaluated in a collaborative and reflective manner.

Implications for Education and Development of Scholar-Practitioners

This paper provokes two implications for the education and development of scholar-practitioners. First, it suggests that an executive education and development orientation which integrates the intense engagement of the individual scholar-practitioner with endeavours to improve or change organizational performance. It demonstrate how the framework of first, second and third person practice is useful in capturing the range of experiences and challenges that the insiders face as they work to develop and lead change in their organizations. Engaging in 'messy iterative groping' in their own organizational systems demands that scholar-practitioners have both methods and skills that enable them to do in first, second and third person practice in a rigorous, reflective and relevant manner. Such programs for senior managers, administrators or leaders from different sectors could enrich cross-disciplinarity and enhance the offerings a university provides for the world of practice that is often alienated

Knowledge that is robust for scholars and actionable for practitioners.

from the world of the scholar.

Secondly, it provides a rich forum for research, both in terms of the outputs of the scholar-practitioners and in terms of the rich narratives of rigorous, reflective and relevant engagement in the scholarship of practice that can enhance our understanding of how it works and contribute to the sparse enough literature on the subject.

This paper has adopted the position that scholar-practitioners are not merely practitioners who do research but rather that they integrate scholarship in their practice and generate actionable knowledge, that is, knowledge that is robust for scholars and actionable for practitioners. This paper is exploring how the work of scholar-practitioners cannot be explored without considering the scholar-practitioners themselves, how they attend to and learn about themselves in action, how they build and enact collaborative relationships with others and how actionable knowledge is generated. From the perspective of the scholarship of practice, a methodology and methods of inquiry the three practices need to meet the requirements of being rigorous, reflective and relevant.

References

This paper is drawn from:
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