Insider Research and Reflective Practice: Getting Published:

Extending an experiment in critical friendship

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Developmental Paper

This aim of this paper is to share and extend the conversations which emerged at the UFHRD sponsored workshop on: Insider Research and Reflective Practice – getting published. The workshop was hosted by Liverpool John Moores University in October 2014 and over 70 delegates, academics and Doctoral students, contributed to the conversations.

It is increasingly common for academics and students in HRD and other applied disciplines such as education and health to select their own organizational setting as a site for their research. This insider research is a key feature of many taught postgraduate and Doctoral programmes and forms an important component of bridging the perceived divide between practice and research. This bridging is fundamentally important for an applied discipline such as HRD. Insider research brings challenges and tensions; in particular the need to reconcile an identity as 'researcher' while retaining the choice of remaining a member of the organisation within a desired career path when the research is complete (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). However, despite the rise in popularity and the insights into both theory and practice that insider research can offer, it receives scant attention in the published research literature.

The October 2014 workshop, which served as the initial catalyst for this developmental paper, tackled this challenge. Participants were invited to consider the perceived barriers to publication and shared ideas about actions and activities to more fully realize the potential of insider research. The challenge was to enable the wider dissemination of insider knowledge and knowing within both the academic and practitioner communities. The workshop focused on the challenges involved in doing, writing and publishing this type of research and several participants identified themselves as belonging to a 'business community'; challenging the academic/practitioner divide.

This developmental paper will share our analysis of the data generated during the October 2014 workshop and our initial sense making. In doing so our paper and our presentation of it are inspired by the ideas of a 'critical friend' as articulated by VIDA, the Critical Management Studies Women's Association. They describe a 'critical friend' as - http://www.vidascholars.org/critical-friend-scheme:

> a trusted peer who asks provocative questions, provides alternative lenses through which to examine data or experiences, and offers critiques of your work, issues or problems. …Finally, critical friendship is more than a technical exercise predicated on a context-free, asocial or ahistorical environment; rather, it is a process of argumentation that emerges from dialogue, interpretation, experience and active attempts to both subvert and navigate through prevailing power structures.

The lead author has experienced the first 'experiment in critical friendship' which took place at the Critical Management Studies (CMS) Conference 2013. She was inspired by the support and critique offered and the co-generation of knowledge which emerged. While recognising the foundations of the movement in Feminist and Women Studies we would like to extend the 'critical friendship' experiment to include men and women who recognise the need to: 'subvert and navigate through prevailing power structures'. In doing so we situate this paper within Critical HRD viewed as: 'a potentially emancipatory project' (Stewart et al. 2014). We also acknowledge the role of higher education (HE) as a site of employment as well as a site of CHRD practice. Therefore, this paper extends a conversation in order to:

1. Situate Insider Research within the context of the debates regarding the social relevance of knowledge, with a particular focus on education as a site of CHRD practice.
2. Extend the conversations raised (and those which have progressed) at the Oct. 2014 workshop with regard to doing, writing and publishing Insider Researcher.
3. Explore the tensions involved in 'providing' management education and professional qualifications within the current economic and political context.
4. Contribute to the CHRD and relevance agendas by developing a plan for action to include: seeking sources of funding, collaborative publication and dissemination.

In conclusion, it has been argued that CHRD has 'come of age' (Stewart et al 2014) and key concepts such as power, identity, emotion and reflection inform the debates. Critical reflection continues to be a preferred method of investigation and this development paper contributes to this methodology by extending and elaborating on critical reflection as a social process which can be enacted through the practice of critical friendship. We would like to thank those who contributed to the October 2014 workshop and hope they can join us to provide feedback on our sense making and help to shape the future agendas.

References:

Coghlan, D., & Brannick, T. 2010. Doing Action Research in your own Organisation. London: Sage.Brannick & Coghlan, 2007

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Stewart J.; Callahan J.; Rigg C.; Sambrook S. & Kiran Trehan (2014) Realizing the critical in CHRD: strategies for research and practice, *Human Resource Development International*, 17:4, 379-383