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Preface

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"I've seen horrors… horrors that you've seen. But you have no right to call me a murderer. You have a right to kill me. You have a right to do that… but you have no right to judge me. It's impossible for words to describe what is necessary to those who do not know what horror means."

Colonel Kurtz, *Apocalypse Now*

Literature, Art and Management: Insights, Perspectives and Synergies

We begin this Preface with the quote from one of the greatest of all films based on Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* to show how literary fiction can provide us with powerful social and ethical dilemmas. It is due to its potential to present such complex and fundamental issues in an engaging way that makes this medium so important. Through literature, we are offered the opportunities to vicariously experience, imagine and consider issues and interpersonal exchanges entirely different from those we are accustomed to and in so doing, broaden our knowledge of situations, values, beliefs, worldviews and communication styles that exist in other socio-cultural settings.

The collection of works gathered in this volume accurately captures the above view by showing how the use of literature and other forms of art can be employed to investigate a wide range of issues concerning the theories and practices of management. This may well be the logical extension of the relentless challenges to what has been previously accepted as suitable content, i.e. the 'literary canon', but also the function of literature and other art forms in society, and the need to include works from minorities and writers from around the globe. None of this has been an easy struggle and despite greater acceptance of new forms and voices, literature and the arts in general continue to fight for acceptance beyond the limited contexts of galleries, theatres and best seller lists, and emerging artists continue to demand their voices be heard along with the more established figures.

New voices can only strengthen the power of literature and art to make us more aware of life's myriad possibilities, peculiarities and ambiguities by presenting us with a range of choices we can make when confronted with a particular problem and enabling us to engage in new ways of thinking about our increasingly complex world. In this way, literature, and other forms of art, can help us break with received and preconceived assumptions about how others want us to see things and react in certain circumstances, and guide us to conceptions and reactions which are more individualistic, unique, context specific – and, perhaps, groundbreaking. Let's consider, for example, a dictionary description of a pear and Wallace Stevens' poem on the same subject. According to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* a pear is "a pome fruit of a tree (genus Pyrus, especially P. communis) of the rose family that typically has a pale green or brownish skin, a firm juicy flesh, and an oblong shape in which a broad base end tapers upward to a narrow stem end." If we juxtapose this attempt at a factual description of what a pear is with Wallace Stevens' poetic evocation, are we able to unequivocally say that one description renders a more 'accurate' mental picture than the other?

I

Opusculum paedagogum.

The pears are not viols,

nudes or bottles.

They resemble nothing else.

II

They are yellow forms

Composed of curves

Bulging toward the base.

They are touched red.

III

They are not flat surfaces

Having curved outlines.

They are round

tapering toward the top.

IV

In the way they are modelled

There are bits of blue.

A hard dry leaf hangs

From the stem.

V

The yellow glistens.

It glistens with various yellows,

Citrons, oranges andn greens

Flowering over the skin.

VI

The shadows of the pears

Are blobs on the green cloth.

The pears are not seen

As the observer wills.

Wallace Stevens, *Study of Two Pears*

The collection of papers gathered in this issue sets out to challenge the traditionally held dichotomy that definitions, reports, statistics etc. provide facts which are of more practical use to individuals in the real world than literature and art, which offer personal and subjective experience and interpretation. It is true that novels, plays, poems and other literary genres are not factual, and that they differ in purpose from these types of writing that are meant to transfer facts and data. Creative art of all kinds focuses on the imagined experience which is created through the transformation of "the facts the world provides – people, places and objects – into experiences that suggest meanings" (Meyer, 2002, p. 2). It also focuses on the effect such imagined experience has on the conceptions and subsequent actions of the recipients.

With this collection, we hope to show how literary works, and other art forms, convey a particular interpretative perspective which we can accept, adopt and employ in problem solving and re-conceptualizing situations across a variety of academic fields and work settings. Indeed, the flexibility of creative art provides us with possible alternatives to deal with the increasingly complex, digital, inter-connected, but culturally diverse world of today. The possession of alternative visions is essential in our globalised and digitalised professional settings as "People who make the most significant contributions to their professions – whether in business, engineering, teaching, or some other area – tend to be challenged rather than threatened by multiple possiblities. Instead of retreating to the way things have always been done, they bring freshness and creativity to their work" (Meyer, 2002, p. 4). The overarching conclusion which follows from this perspective is that a critical reading or experiencing of art brings about an important change in us: we are alerted to the presence of subtleties that require us to pay closer attention to nuance and to challenge our own preconceptions.

A twofold benefit for the teaching of management and organisation studies that emerges from the above observation and the contributions gathered in this volume is as follows:

1) It offers business schools, students and trainers the possibility to broaden their conceptual and practical approaches to problem solving in the field of management and organisation, the famous 'thinking outside the box' idea;

2) It helps make links between management studies and other academic disciplines, such as literature, sociology, psychology, philosophy or applied lingistics, thereby challenging preconceptions and enriching possibilities for synergy.

This is in line with current ideas of 'interdisciplinarity' and 'interconnectivity' which today dominate educational and workplace contexts, placing emphasis on establishing an inclusive and participatory learning environment. Although approached from different perspectives, these two notions emerge as a recurrent theme in the papers collected in this volume.

In the opening paper, *Artistry, Management, and Creativity: Links and Common Denominators*, Michał Szostak conducts a thorough analysis of cognitive, affective and social processes in the functioning of managers and artists. Szostak first outlines the importance creativity has in the world, proposing that it is the link between many of life's activities with specific reference to art and management. His detailed description and exemplification of this phenomenon finally takes us to the thorny issue of linking the theoretical considerations of creativity and the creative process with its practical application. Szostak investigates the nature of the producer of creative works, the creative output and the recipient of this creative output, which he then links to the process of communication. Alongside these considerations runs Szostak's conceptualisation of the creative identity. Identity is seen as fundamental in all creative undertakings

and Szostak reflects on its nature, including the aspects of its uniqueness, degrees of strength and complexity as well as its fluidity. Next he moves on to consider the importance society and context have on identity formation; i.e., how people identify themselves in certain social roles. The application of the above concepts are then considered in the social context of the organisation and management. Szostak identifies specific situations in which creativity functions in organisational management, using convincing examples to clarify his points. However, he flags a warning that creativity is not limitless and can be limited by individual or external factors. He concludes his paper by pulling the previous considerations together to demonstrate how artistry, management and creativity have common denominators which link them to one another, and which render them essential in bringing new perspectives to management.

Duncan Pelly in his paper entitled *How Can Lean Six Sigma Foster Organizational Entrepreneurship in a Military Bureaucracy?* addresses the ways in which monolithic regimes can be resisted and organisational change brought about by the adoption of the practices of 'Lean Six Sigma' (LSS) and 'narrative entrepreneurship'. LSS is a dialogic process that specialises in querying traditional assumptions and practices of bureaucratic organisations, while 'narrative entrepreneurship' is proposed as an alternative to the traditional monologic discourses of bureaucracies. The author chooses to use an autoethnographic methodology which works well to clearly describe the processes at work and then offers a post-event analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of said processes. Through a series of vignettes, he outlines the organisational task, describes how this task was approached by way of LSS and narrative approaches and then proceeds to evaluate the success or otherwise of these approaches. The application of narrative approaches to effect change is a highly useful contribution to the challenges we are witnessing to traditional management practices.

In his contribution, Łukasz Muniowski investigates the creation and presentation of an identity in the field of rap music. Muniowski describes how in this area of art and music, identities are normally constructed by media companies, whereas in the case of his chosen performer, the public persona is created uniquely by the artist through his lifestyle, visual presentation and song lyrics. For Muniowski, creating a unique *persona* involves understanding and rejecting the expectations of your audience; one such expectation is that an individual seeking to create a public persona should be agentive. The author goes on to argue that in a culture where the imperative to do anything rather than nothing has become the dominant *ethos*, a more effective public *persona* can be created by demonstrating that an individual has agency but chooses not to use it. The author compares the dominant value and belief system present in the genre of rap music (which he describes as essentially neoliberal) with his chosen artist's value and belief system. Through this comparison, Muniowski presents his notion of successful identity creation in this genre, and through descriptions of the artist's public output, he shows how, in having agency but choosing not to use it, the artist is creating 'believability' in his persona. This conscious choice to reject agency, what Muniowski terms 'laziness', also helps create a more 'real' public persona. 'Reality' is placed in contrast to 'authenticity', a concept which is important to the rap genre. 'Authenticity', he argues is often created commercially by the rap music industry, whereas being 'real' involves creating a *persona* which has self-agency and is true to an individual's own belief and value system.

David Boje, Duncan Pelly, Sabine Trafimow, Rohny Saylors, and Jillian Saylors employ the play *Tamara* by John Krizanc (1981) to introduce and develop the concept of multiple dialogues/monologues happening simultaneously yet spatially apart, and the resultant myriad of 'understandings' and relationships that can ensue. Boje et al. call this phenomenon 'Tamara-land' and present it as a situation which is typical of most organisational cultures: discourses occur in

multiple settings and with multiple audiences making it impossible to witness and/or participate in these polyphonic conversations. The authors' premise is that organisational behaviour can be understood through storytelling venues which are characterised by the infinite permutations brought about by their polyphonic nature. Boje et al. use two case studies to contrast the traditional assumptions in management studies, namely that the stories told are monologic, recounted on a single stage to a stationary audience. With their notion of a plurality of stories, the authors contest these assumptions and show that stories are dialogic in nature and occur in different locations to a fluid audience. These are what Boje et al. term as 'antenarratives' and view as fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective and unplotted constructs. Undoubtedly, this contribution offers a very interesting insight into the nature of organisational discourses.

In Antony Hoyte-West's book review of Gupta & Adler's, *Backable: The Surprising Truth Behind What Makes People Take A Chance on You*, he first points out that the relationship between literature and economic forces is not a recent phonemenon, but has perhaps always been the case. He cites the centuries held practice of art patronage as a prime example of this. Gupta and Adler focus specifically on the skills and knowledge involved in marketing products, ideas and effectively, the person doing the selling. Hoyte-West points out that the skills involved in persuading people to 'take a chance on you', are becoming fundamental in many areas of life, including academia. This is certainly a valid point as all academics today are aware that they live in a 'publish or perish' professional environment. The book's main theme is backed up by anecdotes and a 7-step method to success. Hoyte-West suggests that these steps may well be adopted by academics in a variety of fields and we feel it would be interesting to apply this 7-step methodology to say, academic publishing, in future research in this area.

In Pietrzak's review of Morgan, Lange and Buswick's book *What Poetry Brings to Business,* we are introduced to the notion of how

literature, the arts, and in this case poetry, can enhance flexible thinking and the ability to address complex issues as well as improve empathy. He summarises their ideas into 3 major areas:

1) the need for instruction in order to train professionals to be more creative which they suggest is essential in any business context;

2) the effectiveness of poetry in helping professionals deal with inconclusive or ambiguous situations; the idea being that by its nature poetry can be interpreted on many levels, and is ambiguous and rarely offers conclusions or resolutions to issues;

3) the fact that poetry works on the reader's imagination and invites them to imagine other worlds and states of 'being' in this world, and in this way can help professionals be more 'other-orientated'. Empathy has long been linked to aspects of ethics and morality and is therefore seen as an essential aspect of management.

The book addresses these issues through anecdotes and examples, and also through the consideration of how poems might be employed in MBA and corporate training courses worldwide. It is perhaps here that Pietrzak questions Morgan et al's underlying objective. He wonders whether all poetry would be suitable for such an endeavour, or whether the management and organisation courses would require particular themed poems. He sees a mismatch, or a disjoint between the objectives of Morgan et al with this book and the objectives of businesses which deal with balance sheets and profit margins. This leads him to ponder whether the exigencies of the business world can be served by the introduction of poetry on MBA and management training courses.

It may be, though, that Pietrzak is missing the central point at issue here, just as CEOs or managers who ask 'what can poetry do for the bottom line?' are missing the point. In a world where

companies spend billions of dollars on L&D budgets, training employees in a range of skills that may or may not have passed the cost/benefit test, it is often forgotten that, as Donella Meadows famously noted as far back as the 1990s, mindset is the biggest leverage point in any system. From mindset, Meadows insisted, all else flows. If this is indeed so, it seems self-evident that a modest spend on a skill development that can have a direct and positive effect on the mindset of employees (either in-company or on MBA and management training courses) could be a transformative investment in the future of any organisation.

It remains true, of course, that even if cost/benefit analysis is not particularly well suited to assessing the benefits that poetry may offer, business leaders will want to know what they are getting into if they embrace poetry within their organisational structures or within their training. What are the positive effects of poetry? Is there any knock-on potential? The urgent need to raise mindset capability to meet the exponentially increasing complexity of the business environment must inevitably put increased focus on practicality. Do participants undergo shifts in attitude that indicate positive outcomes in terms of an organisation's mindset? Does poetry boost creativity? Feed into the 'softer' goals of job satisfaction and retention? Nurture empathy, self-awareness and self-esteem?

In a recent essay, published in FastCompany magazine in 2020, Morgan shared further research which showed the range of the powerful effects poetry can have in business situations. Participant questionnaire responses from a range of workshops undertaken between 2009 and 2019 indicate that typically around 80% of participants reported agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposition that working with poetry can encourage engagement in 'thinking differently', being 'more flexible', and feeling 'more confident'. In a project with a UK government ministry that extended over two months, two-thirds of participants reported that they – and their thinking – had gained from the process, citing specific value in

terms of better acceptance of ambiguity, a greater appreciation of the importance of language, and recognition of multiple perspectives. While this data is from a small numbers base, it nevertheless gives a useful indication of the practical benefits potentially accruing from engagement with poetry, as well as suggesting a positive attitude by employees to the processes poetry demands and offers.

What does seem clear is that in a fast-paced world that increasingly demands highly qualitative and creative decisions, the poetry-reader's requirement to engage at multiple levels of meaning simultaneously, to exercise fine judgements, to apprehend nuance and translate conflicting imperatives into workable solutions, chimes tellingly with the business practitioner's pressing need to respond innovatively and creatively. Engaging with the poem's multiple levels – narrative, technique, emotional resonance, cultural subtext – promotes or necessitates the ability, as poet and business executive Dana Gioia puts it, "to separate the superb ideas from the merely very good ones." Separating the good from the great is a vital skill in disentangling and capitalising on the ever increasing complexities of emerging business situations in the twenty-first century.

The last contribution to the volume is Maurizi's review of Pullen, Helin and Harding's book *Writing Differently*, a collection of essays which offers great value to those interested in alternative ways of thinking and writing about research. Maurizi begins her review by asking two basic questions: "Is it possible to write academic texts differently, and break out of the traditional scheme of scientific writing?" And "Is it possible to apply this alternative writing to academic research reporting on organisational phenomena, and to Critical Management Studies?" She comprehensively answers both questions by discussing the content of respective contributions gathered in this book. In doing so, she presents multiple ways of writing about research which can emerge when a scholar is passionate about their work and capitalises on new, personal and reflective ways of expression that resonate with their own.

We hope that contributions to this volume will inspire further cross-disciplinary research into the intersection of management, literature and other forms of art.

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