

TRENDS ON MANAGEMENT EDUCATION AN INTERVIEW WITH **MARY JO HATCH***

by Eduardo Davel **
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During her presence at Federal University of Bahia in March, 2006, for an opening conference on Organization theory, at the NPGA (Post-graduate Centre on Administration), CIAGS (Interdisciplinary Centre of Development and Social Management) linked to the ANPAD's Program on Teaching Development, Mary Jo Hatch (the C. Coleman McGehee Eminent Scholars Research Professor of Banking and Commerce at McIntire School of Commerce, University of Virginia) provided us, on behalf of the *Organizações & Sociedade* Journal, with an interview about management education. Mary Jo Hatch has a Ph.D. in Organization Behavior from Stanford University and her research has been published in many international journals on management. She is also past chair of the Organization and Management Theory Division of the Academy of Management and the author of many books, such as: *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives* (Oxford University Press), *The Expressive Organization: Linking Identity, Reputation and the Corporate Brand* (co-edited with M. Schultz and M. H. Larsen) and *Organization Identity: A Reader* (co-edited with M. Schultz), and *The Three Faces of Leadership: Manager, Artist, Priest* (with M. Kostera and A. Kozminski).

EDUARDO DAVEL – What should be taught in management schools nowadays and in the future?

MARY JO HATCH – Let's start with the things organization theorists have taught in the past that I think we need to continue teaching: organizational culture, the relationship between organizations and their environments, organizational structures and processes, power and politics, organizational change and the implications of all of these topics for the leaders and managers who work in and on organizations. These are all important subjects that will almost certainly continue to be important.

What I see as newer topics have mostly emerged from consideration of how the world is changing. So, technology always comes up as an important topic, though what we mean by technology seems to be changing too. In the most general sense, technological change causes humans to behave differently, for example, as the result of having information presented through the media, through computers, through the Internet. Like many others, I believe that recent technological changes have profoundly affected how work and most other forms of human activity are organized. These changes make several new topics attractive to students of organization. The topics that are the most closely connected to the effects of technology change are complexity theory and knowledge management. But I think that organizational learning, social networks and organizational identity may be more important topics inspired by these changes, even though their connections to technology may be less obvious. Take identity, an old topic that has

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become recently popular in organization studies via its application to organizations. One story goes like this: the changes conditioned by technology subvert institutionalized understandings (e.g., what is work? what is a family? what is an organization?) that help people know who they are. As a result the institutions that these understandings support start changing. This throws the world into flux resulting in people suffering confusion about their identities and the identities of their organizations and societies. These identity crises are why I think this topic has become important again now, and why organizational identity is such a profound concern for organization theorists for the foreseeable future.

Finally, I think that Art is becoming important for students of organization. Aesthetic considerations have been set aside for a long time now due to the enormous importance we have given to the economic and technological aspects of business. But the pendulum seems to be swinging back to art, or at least to ethics, which for me is closely aligned with aesthetics. For example I see a desire on the part of many academics, both young and seasoned, to engage in research that embraces emotional and aesthetic ways of knowing. Perhaps all the changes and the subversion of past identities that has left people feeling a bit drained is compensated by art which brings new inspiration, pleasures and hope. So I think art and aesthetics will be important aspects of what we teach and how we do research in the future. That may be a very biased view, however, because it is what I am most excited about right now.

EDUARDO DAVEL – From that perspective, what do we need in terms of teaching and professors? What kind of Professor should we look for?

VANESSA P. MELO – What would be the “ideal type” of professor in this panorama?

MARY JO HATCH – I’m a big believer in interdisciplinary studies. I think people should train in at least two if not three different disciplines in the course of their academic careers. The most exciting research always seems to be inspired by a combination of ideas from different sources, the more diverse the better, so, instead of taking one subject and following it all the way through one’s career, we should look for academics who are less constrained by disciplinary boundaries than most are today. This would be a great way to improve universities in my view.

Another way to achieve interdisciplinarity is by encouraging collaboration. Personally I have benefited from many research collaborations both within the universities for which I have worked, and with colleagues from other universities. The latter have been especially beneficial when the collaboration crossed national boundaries. Others with similar international experiences to mine also report that it brings value to both their teaching and research, not to mention to their universities. The collaborative approach to doing academic work, in my view, should be something we encourage as a means to broaden our knowledge base and make it more accessible to others.

Another area that would benefit from greater collaboration is that between theory and practice. If we are to enhance the benefit our knowledge provides, then we need to work with the practitioners who realize its value. Countries like Brazil, where most academics cannot afford to live on their academic salary alone, have a high percentage of business faculty with both practical and research experience, but the pressures of doing everything all at once too early in one’s career are not good for the development of theorists. It takes time to grow into theorizing, and we must find ways to give those with an interest in developing that capacity the time and intellectual space to do so. In other parts of the world, where academic salaries are better, the split between those who theorize and those who practice can be so great that much of the benefit of knowledge production is going to waste. We should encourage academic theorists to be more involved in practical matters. Although this has long occurred through allowing faculty members

to engage in consultancy, it would bring useful change to our institutions of higher learning if we brought the practical problems of the world directly into our educational programs. Of course, we must be careful not to abandon teaching theory and theorizing in the process, and we must be mindful of the time it takes to grow a theorist.

So, from the perspective described above, the ideal academic career would be one that has many pieces, many streams coming together, It would have different disciplinary foundations, and would involve collaborations with many different academics and with those who are meant to benefit from the knowledge that academics are trained to produce.

EDUARDO DAVEL – Why art is an important topic in management teaching? Integrating art in management educational programs requires a different style of teaching or a distinct profile of professors?

MARY JO HATCH – I am not sure whether this is universally important or will end up being only a sub-theme within the field of organization studies. For the moment it is a sub-theme, but my instincts tell me that, just as with the topic of culture in the 1980s, the topic of art and aesthetics in business will change how we view many other organizational phenomena. So, we'll see.

To give you some imagination for what is currently going on in this area, let me tell you about a group with which I have been involved called AACORN (Art, Aesthetics, Creativity & Organization Research Network, see www.aacorn.net). AACORN is an international community of academics and artists that has grown over the past 5 or so years, from 11 people who attended a preconference workshop of the Academy of Management, to 150 members with new members joining all the time. Among the artists who belong to AACORN you will find dramatists and playwrights, poets, actors, painters, sculptors, conceptual artists, musicians and many others, most of whom look at organizations either as a medium for self-expression, or as the recipients of the benefits that artful practices provide (e.g., creativity, innovation, self-insight). Many do consulting work for organizations, but are also practicing artists. Then, there are the academics who are interested in studying what the artists are doing or who themselves engage in art inspired applied organizational work or teaching. And some of the academics are also artists! Some just want to connect aesthetically with their own work lives, others seek to express themselves in order to help others to do so. Finally some academics take a philosophical approach studying the ways in which organizations are aesthetic and/or studying the aesthetic sensibilities that organizational members or researchers bring to work or to their organizing and research practices. For example, some study emotions in organizations while others look at what people hang on their office or factory walls, the design of their architecture and the way in which they decorate their spaces or their clothing, or they examine what smells, sounds and other sensory experiences influence the way we understand organizations or practice organizing. In other words they study the expressive and sensual aspects of organizations, organizing and organizational life. Those are some of the many activities AACORNers have promoted and been involved in, alongside creating an Art in Business network community. There are other such communities as well, primarily in Europe as far as I know, but AACORN is the one I know the most about.

Personally, I find thinking about applications of different art forms compelling and have been using what I know about jazz and painting and the methods employed by artists to develop new metaphors for organizing. The jazz metaphor, for example, gives leaders new ways to relate to their colleagues and subordinates. Ideas drawn from listening to jazz, and understanding the ways jazz musicians interact to produce jazz, help managers develop jazz-like practices such as passing the solo to others (this provides a model of shared leadership) and, when they do so, to then comp behind the solos others perform (this can involve laying down the equivalent of a bass line or rhythm for others to play over, and/

or feeding soloists ideas if they get stuck). I also use jazz to explain to incoming students how to collaborate in the classroom. This helps them to get the most out of case discussions, team projects, and Q&A session with their teachers or classroom visitors. So jazz has been one art form that has inspired my work with managers and management students.

Another art form to which I am partial is painting, which I am now beginning to use to reframe my understanding of how theorists work. Painting methods introduced during different eras offer a metaphor I am using to explore the differences between theorizing from modernist, interpretive and postmodern perspectives. For example, I am using the contrast between representational and gestural art to explain the differences between organization theorists who adopt objectivist/positivist philosophical positions and those who prefer to ground their research in subjectivist/interpretive approaches. Along with the jazz metaphor, I hope my description of painting methods as metaphors for theorizing gives you some ideas for applying art and aesthetic sensibilities within the fields of business practice and organization theory.

Because art can be very playful, it is fun to work in this area and I am a big believer in having fun. Although there is much serious work to be done to gain academic respectability and to turn insights derived from this research into publications, I believe art in business could reinvigorate organization studies by introducing playfulness. But to say a bit more about the difficulties of pursuing art and aesthetics, one of the reasons many artists perform on a stage or paint pictures or sculpt, is because they can express so much more in these ways than if they tried to use words. For similar reasons, when you enter the territory of art and aesthetics in business, you may find it difficult to produce academically acceptable publications. Because we're so used to using words and our intellect, we struggle to incorporate other aspects of our being into a discourse that until now has been so dependent upon words and intellect. So, it will take some time, but I believe art in business will bring tremendous new insight and opportunity, as well as pleasure, to organizations and to those of us who study them.

VANESSA P. MELO – You have explained about what should we teach and who should teach. Does this modify the way of teaching?

MARY JO HATCH – My personal belief is that we no longer need to deliver information, because information has become so pervasive. For example, many times during a lecture on some academic subject, one of my students has Googled the concept under discussion on the Internet, raised their hand and said something like: 'Oh!, you know, this other person thinks exactly the opposite of you. What do you make of that?' You realize pretty quickly that students don't need us to tell them what information is out there.

So, if we don't need to emphasize the delivery of information any more, which is my proposition, then what are we there for? Have we become dinosaurs? One thing I hear people say is 'Because there's so much information floating around, we have to help people learn how to process information'. This is where theory comes in handy. Theories help students frame information and develop their knowledge about their subjects of study. Using theories we can give them ideas about how we understand the world, and act as role models for information processing and knowledge generation. But it seems like we should also be able to go beyond these things. If we no longer have to feed students information, then we face an opportunity to do lots of other cool stuff. And, we're not taking enough advantage of that.

What Tania Fischer is doing here at the Federal University of Bahia with CIAGs is a great example of what I am talking about. Combining knowledge with practice by getting students to develop projects that give people opportunities to change their organizations and communities is a truly inspired and inspiring idea. Teaching in this context means that as you engage in activities alongside students,

you give spontaneous mini-lectures on appropriate subjects at the moment that they are most relevant. When this happens students understand the link between theory and practice with little effort compared to the normal practice of sitting in a classroom wracking your brains for examples of the concept or theory you introduced today for no particular reason other than that a few months ago you had to organize your syllabus and today ended up being concept X day! I think this is an exciting development. It marks the beginning of what could be a much needed revolution in pedagogy. Professor Fischer is on the cutting edge of what hopefully will be happening all over the world in Business education and beyond.

There's absolutely no reason why education can't take place where the activity to which it should be applied is going on. But we need to face the fact that it changes who we are as professors. We're no longer going to play the role of the smart professor at the front of the room. We have to share leadership with our learning partners. The beauty of this is that we get to continue to learn all the time. I think that sort of learning will be a great advantage to our universities and to the world. So that's my answer. It fits together with the question before 'What kind of teacher do we need?' And I think that's a very different person than we've been training in our PhD programs up until now.

EDUARDO DAVEL – What forms of resistance can we face during this transition of educational mentality?

MARY JO HATCH – The first level of resistance comes from people who have power in the universities and want to maintain the old model with the teacher at the front of the room telling students what they need to know. If our university leaders don't develop vision for changing this model, it could be slow going. The second level of resistance comes from people who see the need and want to change, but who don't have the skills to do it, and either don't know how to go about gaining these skills or don't have the flexibility to learn new ways of teaching. And, of course, the third level of resistance is that during the change period, a lot of chaos is going to occur, and there will be very bad examples for critics to point to and say 'See, it was a very bad idea to change!' If this happens many people could lose the courage change requires. So, for now, it's unclear to me whether institutions of higher education are too crystallized for change to take hold, or whether we will have what it takes, including the leaders we will need to see it through. If universities are resistant to change, they will need to be replaced by some other institution in the future.

One hopeful sign that change is possible and already underway comes from the recent appearance of a number of PhD programs aimed at business executives. These programs attract mid and late career executives, usually vice presidents and above, who want to continue their education beyond the MBA, masters or undergraduate degree they already have. These programs allow their students to earn a PhD or other advanced degree without giving up their day jobs. The promise of these programs, from an academic point of view, is that their graduates will stay in the business world operating as scholarly practitioners who understand the value of academic research and will eventually figure out how to make the best use of academics because the melding of theory and practice is their forte. These new executive PhDs can aid in the transition between what our institutions of higher learning are doing today, and what they will be doing in the future. They will sit on university advisory boards, take leadership positions in various alumni groups, provide funding and research sites for students and faculty, and act as research partners, mentors and advisors. Some will even join the ranks of business professors, but hopefully not too many as we need the partnership potential they can offer from their positions within business. Their influence I am certain will be an important means to helping our universities reinvent themselves.

But what I would hate is if we went so far as to lose our collective value for theory, that we stopped trying to communicate and write about what we learn

and ceased to disseminate it broadly. If this new form of education becomes a series of action research exercises that never get documented and presented to a wider audience, never get reflected on and connected to grander schemes, I think that, first theorists, and then theory will disappear. That would be a bad thing in my view. I still think Karl Lewin was right when he said "There is nothing so practical as a good theory." Though it can be difficult to locate and explain the connection between theory and practice, we have to keep trying because this is the promise of business education. Without this, we *should* go the way of the dinosaurs!