

The Pursuit of Excellence: Can Academics Join the Dots

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Covering letter for:

“The Pursuit of Excellence: Can Academics Join the Dots”

Submitted to *High Ranking Journal*

Dear George

(It is so nice to be on first name terms with one of the editors.)

Please find attached a submission for your journal which we note is highly ranked.

In order to expedite publication I have already had it reviewed by two peers. This has rendered the usual charade of formal submission unnecessary – hence our submission directly to you. (We thought of including Michael and Annie and Cedric and Sheila and Nolene and Maria and Abbie and Ann and Beth and Mona and Emmaline as well but didn’t want to bias the submission.)

Reviewer 1 is in an office on the same floor as me and she is very nice. As you can see her review is quite positive. Reviewer 2 is from two floors below. He is clearly hidebound by tradition and has not been so enthusiastic. I will deal with him in due course. The issue of blind review has been taken care of by not using their names.

This is an A+ article. Please ensure that this is made very clear when you publish it. It has been ranked by the SOD system. The acronym derives from the first names of the reviewers and the author. You may not be familiar with this ranking system yet. This is the first article that we have ranked. However we are working hard on ensuring we become a highly ranked ranking.

I think that covers everything. You may in the interests of transparency want to publish this covering letter and the reviews with the article. Feel free to do so, but note that this will then alter the authorship of the piece. This will not be a problem since we have already agreed to each claim 100% each of the final credit.

I look forward to notification of acceptance and publication date.

Yours sincerely

Damian

PS If any special arrangements are needed to facilitate publication please let me/us know. We may have friends in common or we could organize a special issue – you know the gig.

PSSSST I have many other articles I can include in the bibliography.

Abstract

The paper emerges from extensive and in-depth reflection on being an academic. It illustrates the benefits of economy of expression, which, besides producing a paper that is shorter than the abstract, focuses attention on a certain academic mode of being and the accompanying sensibility.

A perusal of many sources (well, mainly Nick and Sverre) reveals that academics are playing a game that masters them and have more capital in gaming skills than in scholarship. They can rapidly be excellent and then ex-excellent. They become "excellent" academics through chance, freaks of circumstance, a mix of networking and nepotism, doing deals with mates, tailoring their work to meet expectations, creating self-serving entities, self-publishing, forsaking a normal life, stifling their imaginations, limiting their expressions of thought, licking the asses of their employers, accepting being colonized, self-plagiarizing, prostituting themselves, knowingly producing work that they think is disgusting and not worth reading, and dancing to tunes they despise. They continue to do so, knowing that the metrics used to assess their work are at best misleading, at worse gamed nonsense and destroy the integrity of their work and undermine their sense of well-being and self-respect.

Over the same era that this mode of being has become more prevalent, there are indications that mental illness among academics is on the rise.

This raises the question of whether academics pursuing excellence can join the dots. It would appear not. This paper offers a meditation on this condition and in doing so contributes to the burgeoning literature on the discourse of "being fucked".

Keywords: academics fuck excellence

The Pursuit Of Excellence: Can Academics Join The Dots?

So there is still a boundary here, and we should take care to understand its contours well. If we don't, we might fall foul of language and morality, and who the fuck would want that?

Martin Parker (2005)

Introduction

We're fucked.

Literature review

We're fucked.

Discussion

We're fucked.

Conclusion

We're fucked.

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Reviewer 1

The paper seeks to contribute to knowledge in several ways. It begins with a succinct overview of the literature on the conditions under which academics operate today, finding from this that we're fucked. It then discusses the state of contemporary academia, finding here too that we're fucked. Arising from this the conclusion is reached that we're fucked. While the paper does not directly address the policy implications of its findings, it would seem to imply that academics might best advise promoters of journal "quality" lists and academic audit regimes to themselves "get fucked" as a key means of beginning to address the problems identified in the paper. Insofar as this paper provides its readers with a sacrilegious delight in the way in which it offends the conventions of academic writing whilst simultaneously accounting for the effects of a complex set of contextual forces and factors which govern our existence, it warrants positive consideration by the editor for publication. The author is to be congratulated for his effort in labouring under such conditions yet at the same time producing work of such rigor and relevance.

Reviewer 2

The author(s) aim to address the current problems at business schools by doing a specific discussion on how, in fact, academics fu*k their own reason of existence and destruct the foundational premises of their profession. Even though I find the overall intention of the paper quite interesting, I have two main concerns regarding the study, (1) the author(s) strongly rely on a political and rhetorical argument about how we as academics are fu*ked. Rather I would like to read some empirical examples or cases telling about the process of being fu*ked that would take the reader to the conclusion about the antecedents and consequences of being an academic. If the authors would like to publish for this journal, they should better re-think their political and rhetorical style. (2) I could not see any methodological rigour and scientific explanation how the authors come to such an argument – where is the sample?

Coda

Informal discussion with the editor addressed in the covering letter revealed that a) we were behind the times in terms of the editorial board and b) the paper would be unlikely to be published because we still had to provide some sense of what it was saying. The third revelation – that our warm personal friendship with said editor was of no advantage at all in getting another A* publication, was disappointing.

So finally, we have to call the bluff. The original author, Damian, surrendered the idea of pushing for more and more formal submissions in order to build up an empirical base from which to theorise academic production (or, if one would prefer, to fuck about). Another author of this piece, Reviewer 1 (Suze) above, thought we ought to explore alternative approaches, somewhat agreeing with the friendly editor's advice (traitor to the cause, thought Damian!). Another author of this piece – Reviewer 2 (Ozan) – agreed with the editor's informal advice (traitor to the cause, thought Damian!) that we indeed should offer some kind of theorisation of what we were doing otherwise what was the contribution were we claiming to make?

So, Suze then produced the following as a way of advancing the debate:

Can academics join the dots? Working notes

Main question to elaborate on: Why can't we publish this paper?

Possible sections/lenses:

- audit/excellence regime – what it demands of us and why it is ridiculous and harmful and offensive to "good scholarship"
- academic subjectivity – what is expected of this subject; what are its duties, rights, obligations, norms, and values; what practices of the self is it expected to engage in
- writing differently: what inhibits and enables this
- artistic declarations as an alternative form of knowledge
- existential crises – and the language they invoke
- what is it to "be fucked"? what if our response is to say "get fucked"?
- what about "going feral" as a strategy of resistance?
- why, actually, can't academics join the dots ... what is it about our norms which prevents this? And what can we do about this?

Over time, Damian produced the following:

"What I am trying to do here is push, even to breaking point, the boundaries of form. When you write Suze of artistic declarations as an alternative form of knowledge you are on to it. I want to push on form to the point where we ask WTF is form for? Well, at one level, of course we know what it is for, and that one cannot for example explore chaos by being chaotic. Creative constraint and all that. But using an artistic frame, we can say that in this

piece of work we expose to scrutiny the extent to which form is dictating content. That sounds more like an artistic project than management theorising. So perhaps we should consider this piece of writing in its entirety as an artistic project that contributes to management theorising. It is not, in itself, management theory. It is not, in itself, a theory about academic labour. But it contributes to our sensibilities about academic labour. It is part of that seam of work that deploys non-traditional methods of inquiry. One thinks of Andrew Sparkes' story seeking consideration, of Pelias' academic tourist, my own organizational cargo carriers and our other work with Andrew on IROR. From this point of view our current work does not seem so radical. It is nevertheless, I **submit**, an aesthetic, interesting and coherent provocation.

Over to you guys.

About the Author(s)

Damian Ruth lectures strategy, organizational change and other courses at Massey University, New Zealand. He draws on the arts, humanities and social sciences to research management development and education with a focus on using craft, art and design to develop strategic thinking. He has published more than 100 journal articles, conference papers and reports on the role of universities and higher education, and the scholarship of teaching and learning. He is a poet, a designer and a maker of things. He focuses on interdisciplinary work and falling through the cracks.

Suze Wilson researches and teaches management and leadership at Massey University, New Zealand. Her research examines leadership, mostly from a Foucauldian perspective, seeking to destabilize conventional understandings and enable the development of new approaches responsive to local context and which directly address questions of purpose, power and ethics. Her research has won international awards. However, as she focusses her attention primarily on book writing, rather than journal article writing, she will likely be lowly ranked in the next audit round.

Ozan Nadir Alakavuklar is a lecturer in management at Massey University School of Management. He likes working on critical and radical ideas not just to interpret but also to challenge the main premises of management education, business schools and the university. He is the founder and principle leader of Engaged Social Science Social Movements Network and member of editorial collective of Ephemera: theory and politics in organization. His passion for critical work happily resulted in publications in various national and international outlets. Currently, he is seeking alternative ways to engage with grassroots organisations to learn more from their wisdom of organising.