

Editorial

We recently received a request from an academic whose book review was awaiting publication in *Prometheus*. A colleague had told him that *Prometheus* is a critical journal. As the academic's annual output was being assessed by his university, he thought he had better withdraw his review – and did. Academics have become accustomed to the carrots offered in return for approved behaviour, basically agreeing with everyone else. Rewards come in the form of easier publication in journals with high impact factors, as bonuses and promotion recognizing this publication success, as ready citation in other papers which also have nothing new to say, and as research resources awarded to explore yet again what is already known. Such carrots can be very considerable both in themselves and in their contribution to intellectual decay. But when the system passes from carrot to stick, punishing those who say anything contentious, a line is crossed; we journey from preferring to publish what brings seductive returns to burning books. It is said that only pet rabbits eat carrots: wild rabbits won't touch them.

Sonali Gupta, from the Indian Institute of Management, uses a research style uncommon in *Prometheus* to present her arguments about business incubators. She separates discussion of the theory surrounding business incubators from direct experience. The experience is that of an individual using the services of an incubator in India and her own experience of managing this business incubator. Such an ethnographic approach can be extraordinarily effective. Though much has been written on how business incubators are supposed to work, the assumption is generally that this is how they do work. Lazy academics and those who have skin in the incubator game (including many universities) are poor critics of the simplistic notion that business knowledge is all that is required to turn an idea into a successful business. Gupta looks at the experience of one Avi, enrolled in her incubator almost by accident, who becomes its star pupil. But this is no promotional success story; the ethnographic approach emphasizes the happenstance that keeps Avi afloat. Avi is an innocent, a half-sane enthusiast, who really does find what he needs to run a business in the incubator environment. In some contrast, Avi's fellow incubatees – and there seem to be hundreds of them – want, and get, something else altogether, the status of association with a prestigious institution. They enlist not to learn, but to be seen at seminars, to rub shoulders at receptions. They may be after finger food rather than brain food, but their very numbers satisfy managerial and institutional need for the metrics of performance.

Prometheus has had a deal to say about management and business schools over the last couple of decades, not least because management and business schools have absorbed many of the smaller units working on technological change, information and innovation. Not all of what *Prometheus* has said has been polite. John Kawalek's paper is a little more respectful, and very much more positive. Kawalek muses on what might be done to insert a bit of intellectual grit into the sloppy business school oyster. Reasoning is key, he reckons, yet the language of management is not universally accepted as the language of logic. Many deride what they term 'management speak'. The argot of managers might have remained little more than a curiosity had it been confined to the business school, but business school graduates have rallied to the call to manage whatever there is to manage. They have spread far and wide and have taken their linguistic infelicity with them. In the BBC, for example, management speak became 'Birt speak' (after John Birt, a director-general much smitten by the merit of management method). Lesser BBC managers learned to talk the talk if not to walk the walk. The world over, grey-suited MBAs spilled out from identical MBA courses in identikit business schools, all equipped with a language tailored to explain that profit rather than social purpose is the point of organization. Such linguistic poverty matters; these days, universities, and even business schools, are expected to demonstrate social impact. Is there a solution? Kawalek looks to Immanuel Kant for inspiration. This is certainly original: Google is so upset by the juxtaposition of 'Kant' and 'business school' that it assumes a spelling error for Kent Business School. It is also courageous.

Kawalek argues that Kant's notion of practical reasoning is applicable to the contemporary imperative. As the typical MBA is unable to pay even lip service to the idea of social purpose, and injects as much distance as possible between theory and practice, Kawalek has his work cut out.

The core theme of the paper by Wesley Moss, Phillip Nichols, Kevin Foster, Megan Ryan and Andrew Guzzomi is that individual farmers play a vital part in agricultural innovation in Australia. This is not exactly a novel message, but its repetition does much to counter the common assumption that innovation requires huge resources, expensive research in basic science and the ability to withstand failure. Because large organisations have these very resources, they also tend to have the ear of government. So, policy is inclined to be slanted towards their interests – in return for the innovation which only large organisations are thought capable of producing. Moss and his colleagues give the lie to this way of thinking. Their case study is clover, horrendously difficult to harvest and more associated with the vast fiefdoms characteristic of so much Australian agriculture than with individual farmers. And yet, even here, the contribution of farmers dominates clover seed innovation. Government, universities and huge multinationals have a role to play in disseminating innovation, but farmers themselves are its drivers. Not a message Monsanto wants to hear.

The issue concludes with eight book reviews and one review essay. Our review essays are longer and more encompassing than traditional book reviews. Originally a category for reviewers carried away by their task, *Prometheus* review essays have become an art form in themselves. Our next issue (volume 38, number 1, March 2022) is our first special issue for years. It's on value change and its relationship with technologies – a treat in store.

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