

EDITORIAL

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0034-759020160401>

ACADEMIA AND PRACTICE

In many business schools, it is always possible to hear many conversations about the distance between academic articles and their applicability to business. This is not a new issue, but one that should be re-examined. The tone of these conversations reflects a critique and, if not disdain, then a skepticism toward these publications, which even includes the idea that they do not serve any useful purpose. Not everything that is done in academia – not just in administration but in other fields of knowledge as well – is worthwhile. But to say that organizations cannot benefit from academic research is another story. Besides, not everything that is done in business is worthy of praise (Ansoff, 1967). Just to provide one topical example, some researches indicate that female membership of corporate boards brings companies various benefits, including a reduction in corruption, but even so, women are clearly underrepresented in boards all over the world. Companies also have practices that should be criticized, and I am not referring to critiques such as those posted by the Critical Management Studies (CMS), Division of the Academy of Management, or the debate about the new targets of conscientious capitalism. Just from a practical point of view, in terms of company productivity many company actions are questionable, especially in Brazil, where academia is even more detached from business.

In addition, these conversations take place between professors that seem to be from different planets: theory and practice. Administrative learning also includes a third element: pop-management publications, apparently practical, but lacking in substance, even though they may be widely known and supported with “scientific” knowledge which leaves large room for doubt. After all, what kind of science are we talking about? As the word itself says, theories are abstractions of reality; they are not, obviously, practical reality, but theories enable us to make generalizations about phenomena and eventually put them into practice. Until recently, the human appendix was considered an unnecessary organ, and its removal was considered innocuous. Now, however, a revision of the “theory” of the appendix’s functioning has shown that this really is not so. Theories are always relative, given that the basis of all science is doubt, even if most prefer certainties. In terms of the critiques that can be made of scientific knowledge, it seems that humans have employed this knowledge to improve their quality of life on this planet. In fact, it seems to me that this is a false dichotomy: theory and prac-

tice are absolutely interlinked. It may be more or less explicit, but any action taken by organizations depends on a conceptual “assumption.” This also is not new; McGregor (1960) discussed this concept more than half a century ago. And the concept of practice itself has been the subject of many studies, and therefore it can and should be questioned. There are many theories about what is practice, as Chia and MacKay (2007) show in the field of administration. But there is always a place for knowledge of high quality.

All of this has been my way of introducing the fourth issue of *RAE*, which contains the results of the Forum entitled “Transnational governance regimes in the global south: Multinationals, states and NGOs as political actors,” organized by Glenn Morgan, Marcus Vinícius Peinado Gomes and Paola Perez-Aleman. This forum, organized both globally and locally, brings a special issue with various articles about what is global and local in terms of practical, and extremely relevant issues for organizations and beyond them discussing global governance. These articles show the impact of theory on practice, even though sometimes this impact may take longer to appear than the immediate answers available by clicking once or twice on our present day “oracles.” The Essay, Book Review and Book Recommendations sections cover the same overall theme. It is a pleasure to present this issue. Congratulations and thanks to the guest editors of the Forum.

Good reading!

MARIA JOSÉ TONELLI | Editor in Chief

Professor at Fundação Getúlio Vargas, Escola de Administração de Empresas de São Paulo – São Paulo – SP, Brazil

REFERENCES

- Ansoff, I. (1967). *Handbook of business administration, research and development planning*. New York, USA: McGraw-Hill.
- Chia, R., & MacKay, B. (2007). Post-processual challenges for the emerging strategy-as-practice perspective: Discovering strategy in the logic of practice. *Human Relations*, 60(1), 217-242. doi:10.1177/0018726707075291
- McGregor, D. (1960). *The human side of enterprise*. New York, USA: McGraw-Hill.