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Business doctoral education as a liminal period of transition: Comparing theory and practice

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A B S T R A C T

In times of growing institutional pressures for publication, looking at the socialization process leading to membership in the business academic community provides the opportunity to reflect on the set of dominant values and practices being advocated to and inculcated by emerging scholars. This essay focuses on the changing role of the doctoral rite of passage which tends, under certain conditions, to construct the doctoral apprenticeship primarily as a technicist path toward professional writing, and less as an empowering and reflexive social inquiry undertaking. Faced with shifting standards, we need to recognize conditions of possibility for emancipation and change, which will hopefully support and sustain scholarly debate through more creative, socially relevant and eclectic research.

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1. Introduction

Accounting and management scholars are increasingly the target of institutional surveillance, with recent developments in funding systems and information technologies having intensified formal evaluation of research endeavors (Parker, 2002). Mainly based on publication records in highly ranked journals, performance measurement purports to provide a rational assessment tool for both external and internal observers. It allegedly gives an idea of the potential added value to public money invested in research (e.g., at a department, faculty or university level), while classifying and comparing individuals according to their displayable productivity (Gendron, 2008). More or less implicitly, accounting and management scholars are pressured to skew research methods and activity (quantitative or qualitative ones) in ways that are appealing to top-tier journals, thereby strengthening the hegemony of publication mores essentially based on the making of incremental, consensus-based research contributions (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013a; Harley and Lee, 1997). That is, rankings have promoted the ascendancy of certain styles of research and a preference for some dominant schools of thoughts, established theories and conventional methodologies. As a result, we are faced with increasing standardization of ways of thinking and behaving, more mimetic work and greater specialization which discriminate against other forms of endeavors located beyond dominant topics of interest, methods, views, formats of writing or outlets (Willmott, 2011). The issue is leading a growing stream of studies to criticize the excessive importance assumed by academic assessments framed around the journal ranking system, not least for its adverse effects on the shape and development of accounting and management research. While performance measurement may secure scholarship accountability in the short-term, it is argued to "stifle innovation and discourage people from becoming academics" (Gendron, 2008, p. 120). It also mitigates our capacity to yield "important results to inform public debate on major issues" (Moizer, 2009, p. 285) and ultimately threatens "the very health

and vibrancy of the field" (Adler and Harzing, 2009, p. 72). This changing set of institutional arrangements calls for an examination of accounting and management academia: where are we at and where are we going?

The present manuscript attempts to look into this matter from my perspective as a PhD student in a business school in North America, focusing on how the logic of performance measurement fashions the doctoral experience. While the literature has further focused on the institutional pitfalls of the current ranking systems (e.g., Adler and Harzing, 2009), the global colonization of academic journals by certain forms of (Anglo-)American styles of research (e.g., Grey, 2010; Murphy and Zhu, 2012), or ways to counteract the lack of new influential organization studies (e.g., Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013b; Starbuck, 2006), this paper directs its attention toward the 'making' of PhDs as a way of gaining insight into the kind of occupational professionals[1] which are nurtured in our field. This approach, I believe, has both theoretical and practical values. First, doctoral education is a normative process influencing prospective academic careers whereby stratification power is at stake, not least the struggle for the set of dominant values and knowledge being promoted and disseminated (Bourdieu, 1984; Hodge, 1995). And second, "it is we, ourselves, who to a large extent are the developers and executers of [this questioned and criticized] system" (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013a, p. 147). Senior members of the academic community, journal editors, department chairs and deans have clearly more agency in determining the shape and trajectory of accounting and management research. However, junior scholars' relative choice of research perspectives, topics and methods also hangs in the balance; we are all instrumental in perpetuating and challenging the canons through each of our assumptions and actions which, in the aggregate, can end up being influential shaping forces.

This essay is an extension and a development of my article "*The PhD program: between conformity and reflexivity*" (Raineri, 2013). In this previous paper, I used a theoretical framework derived from Bourdieu's structural social constructivism and from Foucault's concepts of 'disciplinary techniques' and 'technologies of the self' to examine the conditions within which doctoral students assimilated and reproduced the dominant mores established in academia. While most of my narrative focused on the institutional constraints exerted on PhD students, I increasingly came to the view that I had not sufficiently emphasized the dialectical conditions of possibility for change, emancipation and transcendence offered by doctoral education. In order to fill this gap, I mobilize and use in the present essay Victor Turner's notion of 'liminality' as an ideal-type against which to compare and reflect on my doctoral experience. Theorized as 'a realm of pure possibility', liminality is a transitional stage between an experienced past and a future that has yet to be enacted, a spatiotemporal condensate of social (re)production where individuals learn to interpret ways and customs and eventually develop alternative sets of conceptions for themselves and for their environment (Turner, 1967, 1969). A full (as opposed to incomplete) liminal experience is at once constraining and empowering, being sustained through a dialectic movement that requires the learning of comprehensive knowledge and the capacity to concretely act on it with imagination and creativity, in one word, mastery.

In the next section, I flesh out the notion of liminality. Then, I discuss in two steps the shortcomings and the relative lack of empowerment of business doctoral education when managerialist imperatives tend to dominate over pedagogical ones, and when learning activities are overly disembodied from the ontological and epistemological values that sustain the richness and the diversity of the social sciences. Last, I argue that reflexive sociological and extensive organizational knowledge is a necessary scholarly prerequisite for a genuine liminal experience, and I suggest some emancipative ways – mostly grounded in the critical tradition – of trying to reduce the ascendancy of the status quo.

The empirical base from which I draw is a period of about two years of doctoral experiences at the business school of a significant Canadian university, utilizing observations from direct participation, analysis of internal documents and two interviews undertaken around the end of the interviewees' first year in the program. The two respondents (pseudonyms Liam and Guy) shared some characteristics with me, being men of about thirty years of age who had started their PhD after having worked for global organizations outside of North America. It is also worth noting that the doctoral institution under scrutiny is known to be more liberal than conservative and is far from being an extreme or idiosyncratic example of how doctoral education is impacted by the spread of performance measurement.[2]

2. Liminality

Doctoral education is often construed as a rite of passage (or learning/initiation) that has to be experienced and succeeded with prior to gaining formal access to the academic community (e.g., Deegan and Hill, 1991; Panozzo, 1997; Soudien, 2010). While the notion of rite relates to common imagination, it can be used productively to make sense of the doctoral experience. That is, the rite concept can strengthen one's ability to understand accounting and management PhD programs – although, in practice, this ability is decreasing; a continuing reduction that serves as one of the prime motivations for this paper.

Analytically, rites of passage are structured in three phases: separation, transition, and aggregation (Van Gennep, 1960 [1909]). Although there would be much to say on the first and third phases – and notably on the latter one once the

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[1] "Freidson (1994) distinguished between two categories of professions: those with specific and shared ideological traits and values producing distinct occupational identities with legally protected licenses to practice; and [those] … with greater reliance on protection by professional bodies. In the first category [occupational professions] there is an emphasis on the importance of professionals using their own discretionary judgments. In the second [status professions] there is an emphasis on practicing in accordance with declared and publicly available standards." (Strain, 2005, p. 4).
[2] The specific methodological details are not presented here, but they are available in Raineri (2013).

limen ('threshold' in Latin) is passed and the initiated person is incorporated into the 'ritual' community –, we are more concerned here with the period of mid-transition, for it brings to light the interstices within the regulated and seemingly routine components of everyday life.[3] Rites are key dialectical moments of transformation and reproduction of social groups, values, ties and patrimonies. They unveil the transient state and dynamic regime of social processes, bridging the gap between past, present and future history, and expose "the basic building blocks of culture just when we pass out of and before we re-enter the structural realm" (Turner, 1967, p. 110). In this regard, Victor Turner's seminal work and concept of liminality which defines this central phase and state of '*in-betweenness*' has transcended the anthropological disciplinary boundaries to influence much of social science, including organizational studies (e.g., Garsten, 1999), not least identity transition scholarship (Kornberger et al., 2011; Ladge et al., 2012). Liminality represents organized times and spaces which are ritually freed from some customary social determinacy, and whereby 'initiates' are provided with conditions of possibility to reflect on their own dispositions and question the ontology of social life so that they can 'grow' and become who they 'ought' to be. Yet, the experience of liminality is not speculative, neither is it unconstrained. Initiates are guided by elders who introduce them to the community's cultural foundations through the learning of arcane knowledge. That is, knowledge of 'nature and the cosmos' (topical knowledge as constituted, for instance, in the accounting and management research literature) and knowledge of traditional mores (institutional knowledge regarding what a researcher is and does) in readiness for the tasks of their future office (Turner, 1967, 1969). During this period, the 'apprentices' share similar experiences. At once inside and outside the community, they abandon part of their previous social status to ease and enable their change into a 'higher' self, transiting 'betwixt and between' two social positions – a somewhat ambiguous status otherwise evoked by one of the doctoral students interviewed:

> "To be a PhD student, it's first and foremost to be searching and groping your way. . . . It is as if you have no status in fact, because as long as you don't have a doctorate, you wander, you walk the path. At the end of the day, you have rather the status of a free electron [an unaffiliated person] trying to find itself." (Guy, interview)

As their elders before them and as will those after them, doctoral students put their lives in parentheses to conduct a research degree over a four-to-five-year apprenticeship period where the stake is, in the words of one of our professors, "to find one's place," i.e. to become a native. In this vein, Victor Turner shows in his theorizing how the individuals undergoing the rite see their previous habits of thought, feeling and action being challenged and called into question as they are dialectically forced and encouraged to reflect critically and transcendently on the physical, social and spiritual world. The purpose of which is to endow the liminal *personae* "with additional powers [i.e., knowledge] to cope with their new station in life" (1967, p. 102). As such, liminality is construed as a process of socio-cultural (re)formation, as well as a process of *inward* development of the self where the role of arcane knowledge is paramount, and twofold. On the one hand, institutional knowledge acts as a socializing force through the assimilation of lasting dispositions, habits and usages. On the other hand, topical knowledge serves as a pedagogical object of reflection, offering apprentices "a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence" (1967, p. 106), to make sense of its mysteries and ultimately, to "change from one kind of human being into another" (1967, p. 108). This complex interrelation between the two functions not only ensures the reproduction of lore, but also leaves some discretion for new thoughts, customs and conventions. That is, change, invention and diversity – making the liminal period of transition "a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (1967, p. 97). Now, if I try to examine my doctoral program and my experience as a PhD student in terms of liminality, a somewhat contrasting picture emerges.

3. Entering doctoral education

The PhD program of the business school I enrolled in was known to be open to scholarly diversity while striving for international prestige. Accounting and management doctoral students could create a personalized curriculum based on all three economic, organizational and sociological perspectives. There was a fair balance of theory and methodology courses, and both quantitative and qualitative methods were part of the offer. I thought that I would have had the time to do some theory building, experiment and situate my work critically within historical and philosophical schools of thoughts – in order for me to mature my own ontological and epistemological position while starting to advance my thesis and learning research methodologies. But from the very first day in the program, the set of demands placed upon us as doctoral students left little room for personal empowerment or for reflexivity. We were the target of normative pressures and surveillance mechanisms to make our performance observable, timely, and eventually predictable. The emphasis was immediately placed on graduation as well as on publication, and relatively less (this was a matter of degree, not of kind) on critical thinking or theory development on social and organizational issues. The administrative doctoral 'Collaboration Plan' set the milestones for the students using the management-by-objectives technique and philosophy (see, e.g., Covaleski et al., 1998). Engineered with intricacy to work in accordance with the business school's 'Study Rules' and 'Funding Plan', the Collaboration Plan laid down the way to 'success' and left no room for 'failure':

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[3] For a development of the 'separation' and 'aggregation' phases of rites of passage, the reader is referred to van Gennep (1960 [1909]) as well as Turner's vulgate.

"The Collaboration Plan . . . provides a map for organizing the *productive* work in order to help the student: achieve the *objectives* of the program, make progress in a *timely* manner and, last but not least, take maximum advantage of available *financial resources*." (Collaboration Plan – my emphasis)

"In order to benefit from the Funding Plan, the student shall: [. . .] (3) maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.50 out of 4.33 throughout and until the completion of his or her PhD[4] [as per the Article 299 of the Study Rules]; (4) Meet the criteria and requirements [including the deadlines] of each step of the program." (Funding Plan)

The process was centered on a student crossing one threshold after another with the ultimate objective of arriving at the goal line (i.e., graduation); in essence, a *near* crisis-free and pre-visible track designed so as to lead to the consummation of the passage. The penalty for not conforming was fatal, and the first year of coursework led to the termination of more than half of the PhD students, the majority of whom were asked to leave the program at the end of the first session. Typically, students had three full-time sessions to succeed in seven courses – usually comprising four methodological, two theoretical and one guided readings courses –, and to defend their preliminary thesis project (i.e., to present their literature review and research questions). Most of the method classes (in quantitative, mixed-method and qualitative research) were mandatory. The greater range of theory classes made our choice more discretionary; however, their substance and workload were largely uneven and most students tended, strategically, to select the less demanding ones so as to further their chances of pursuing the program. Also, while some poorly attended classes required assessments that made students reflect on knowledge production as well as the institutions in which it takes place (e.g., epistemology/the sociology of science), most courses asked in a near-dogmatic fashion for the writing of a draft academic paper as a means of examination, whether or not the student already had a clearly defined subject of study or access to a field. I raised this point during one of the Doctoral board meetings; to which I received the answer that the PhD program was preparing us for professional writing and that we somehow had to 'climb on the bandwagon' (which is why I rapidly turned, as a way of helping me to survive the system, to a formal empirical study of my own doctoral education, giving rise to the embryo of the present essay).

Essentially, we were under strict time, intellectual and financial pressures, doing our best to run in a straight line and reflect the set of behaviors and outcomes expected of us. The Collaboration Plan presented business doctoral education as an academic steeplechase, governing at once the distance and height between obstacles as well as the reward. As such, the Doctoral board considered that studying part-time was counterproductive and often synonymous for not being in the program at all. One of the two interviewees, Liam, acknowledged "taking the PhD as a job that [he was] doing." His "game plan [was] to come in, to do [the PhD] as quickly as possible, and to get out with the paper in hand," considering the attached financial incentive as "a facilitating factor helping in the self-discipline" (Liam, interview). The second student, Guy, also stressed that for the sake of subsistence, he had "better be successful, better meet the requirement, better fulfill them, . . . pressured [as he was] to do more to succeed and meet the threshold" (Guy, interview). With little room for trial and error, and limited time for experimentation, it ought not to be surprising (see, e.g., Bargar and Duncan, 1982) that some of us stifled, at least temporarily, our own values, beliefs and convictions, with a short-term view to survival, rather than committedly seek to fulfill our aspirations – as illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

". . . in the end, I tend to follow the professor's ideas. I see what he likes, what he dislikes, and I'm mindful about it, even if it doesn't represent my values, or my own beliefs. I somewhat do consider such things in order to meet the criteria, because at the end of the day, he's the one evaluating and making a judgment on me. So, I direct my ideas toward what he likes; I don't give voice to some of my own convictions. But, it doesn't mean I'm completely giving up; I just make temporary compromises here and there. [. . .] This world [academia] is ultimately shaping my thoughts, my actions. Because I know now that people assess each other, and people can attack you based on your words; you better think first before you say something. It wasn't the case before; I was giving my opinion without having all the stress." (Guy, interview)

The Collaboration Plan was keeping us instrumentally committed to the goal of graduation and making us more malleable to dominant practices and narratives. For that matter, students were increasingly choosing to write a three-paper thesis although the curriculum made no such demand. The pressures for publishing were somehow more subtle and diffused, but by no means less pervasive. They colonized some of the course content and discourses of professors who tended to promote the main interests and methods of the discipline. It was also explained to us that research was better considered as a business-centered, consensual and rigorous endeavor, and less as an intellectual undertaking of social criticism. It seemed as if publishing was less a means of conveying ideas but rather the doorway to 'professional power'.

4. Learning the technicality

Early in the program, we were taught 'market and sell' rhetoric strategies and techniques alleged to enhance our future odds of publication. We were presented with argumentative templates and 'writing do's and don'ts' before having any meaningful discussion on paradigms, on research stakeholders, or on what constitutes the contour of socially legitimate (as opposed to institutionally legitimated and prized) contributions to theory and practice. The learning approach conveyed the

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[4] A grade point average (GPA) of 4.33 is equivalent to 100% or A+; and a GPA of 3.50 is equivalent to 81% which is between B+ and A−.

impression that one chiefly needed to worry about commodifying one's work in order to convince the end reader of its value. The method classes (in quantitative, mixed-method and qualitative research) which were dominant in the apprenticeship, each made demands in terms of assessments within a three-month period comprising the writing of drafts of academic papers (as if we were aiming for publication in a conference or a journal) or of exhaustive research proposals (as if we were aiming for a subsidy application). The choice of topic was free and we were mostly examined on the basis that we had learned the rhetoric and methodological principles of academic writing, rather than developed a profound and nuanced understanding of the theories which informed our research subjects. Persuasiveness was mainly based on two things: (a) the general shape of the paper, its structure and the use of technical jargon, and (b) the grand display of 'unique' contributions to theory and management practice (which were mostly dubious since we had no time properly to explore the literature). Although rhetoric and substance are intertwined, some didactic contents were significantly removed from the ideological, ontological, and epistemological substance which defines the humanities, thereby constraining processes of learning and knowledge development. In short, the time pressure and the focus on technicality made it difficult to think deeply and dialectically about the conditions of production of social science.

For example, in a highly attended mixed-method class where the course material was intended to be poly-paradigmatic, it was quite challenging to make sense, in just two lectures, of the very essence of grounded theory, described as the 'inverse procedure' of the hypothetico-deductive approach commonly used in research endeavors. Instead of being advanced and valued for its idiosyncratic richness, inductive research was reduced to a speculative thought process defined in negative relation to the dominant paradigm. One of the PhD students taking the class had to analyze the grounded theory method applied by the authors of an article chosen by the professor. Fascinatingly, the student's presentation exhibited a methodology where specific explanatory hypotheses were derived from theory, while the paper was clearly asking inductive research questions based on empirical observation. The student had somehow managed to reframe a thought-process with which he was probably not at ease, in a more familiar hypothetico-deductive fashion in order to bolster his feeling of 'ontological security', that is, his confidence in the constancy and continuity of his bearings (Giddens, 1984). Corrected by the professor, he even felt compelled to insist by asking, full of incomprehension, "Does that mean we can conduct research without posing hypotheses?" This episode was not so much to be placed on the student account; we were not properly prepared to ask, address and develop such questions and their implications. Notwithstanding the course's contribution to the doctoral program, a prerequisite in epistemology would have made the learning process more comprehensive, holistic and significant. Yet, no such condition was imposed, leading to some superficiality in both learning and knowledge development processes. This was far from empowering and rather discouraging at first, as one of the interviewees concurred:

> "I think that we have too much quantity and not enough depth in the PhD program. Rather than having three courses [per session] where we need to produce three different assessments [drafts of articles, exhaustive research proposals], we could have a common thread; and maybe having [the courses] spread over two sessions. . . . The exercise would be a little more meaningful, a little more comprehensive, instead of merely scratching the surface [being superficial]." (Liam, interview)

We were presented with early career advice such as: "If you want to publish in 'top' journals, A or A*, you must conduct rigorous quantitative research" (Professor, quantitative method class). This was considered to be the best way to make a 'legitimate' scientific claim comprising findings which are valid, objective and generalizable because they are based on the quantitative analysis of large data-bases. Instead of striving to impose alternative discourses as influential forces of opposition, a number of interpretive scholars happened to deny some of their convictions. For instance, in a qualitative methodology class, a lecturer found it regrettable, and at odds with the course material, that "some methods of investigation, such as participant observation or ethnography, go against the logic of the doctorate: they are time and money consuming" – useful, but inefficient. Even though qualitative research was not formally discouraged, it was somehow singled out as lacking rigor and as being of less corporate and managerial relevance. This was visible in two ways which are interconnected. First, two particular qualitative researchers of the business school were praised for the high quality of their work (i.e., they were often publishing in highly ranked journals) which was qualified by other professors as 'rigorous', 'accurate', building on a 'strong methodology'; implicitly meaning that according to these standards, when qualitative research was conducted by someone else in faculty, it was usually seen as too indulgent, lacking the necessary conditions to support findings of 'scientific' value. Second, some professors with backgrounds in sociology or anthropology, disciplines which are more often than not interested in capturing interpretive understandings, deconstructing the taken for granted and giving voice to social issues, were nonetheless relaying legitimation discourses based upon 'objective' truth-value claims and specific business-centered contributions. They were inclined to think of qualitative research in a functionalist fashion rather than in a critical way, favoring consensual endeavor allegedly holding out the promise of establishing knowledge of a higher status/ significance for management practice. It was considered less risky, providing more outlets for publication, and in agreement to what they felt was expected of them as administrative science scholars.

I thought there would be more room for humanist or idealist discourses of legitimation in order to justify research endeavors, but critical or radical accounts of social and organizational life appeared to be discarded, or at the very least marginalized. It was almost as if there was an onto-epistemological and/or disciplinary straitjacket, a right-thinking approach to research which could best be derived from methodological considerations than from value preferences and positions in all their richness and diversity. I am not a proponent of so-called methodological anarchy (see, e.g., Feyerabend, 1975). However, I find it detrimental that as PhD students we were instilled with the view that "given the

current context [the rise in academic pressures for publication], methodology constitutes the researcher's major asset" (Guy, interview) – and that this was something that went above and beyond the researcher's own ideas, views, motivations and values. We were frequently told that successful research, of the type published in renowned academic journals, was distinguished by the soundness of its approach. The more sophisticated the research design, the more respondents interviewed or surveyed, then the more chance there supposedly is to publish in the top-tier journals of the discipline. I do wonder how many young scholars have decided not to target such journals thinking that their paper lacked rigor(ism) or that the number of participants was not demonstrative or large enough? Similarly, how many scholars have been ordered to 'sophisticate' a manuscript by providing Scott's pi statistics for inter-rater reliability, or by using the latest psychometrical technique *à la mode*? In the end, does it really improve the quality of a paper so much? Even though qualitative and quantitative studies each have their own codes, the ever-increasing institutional pressures framed around the journal ranking system are arguably giving a technicist trajectory to accounting and management research, and with it, PhD programs.

One of the reviewers of this essay rightfully pointed out that if we look back two or three decades when the 'new humanities' emerged (which is better known through the term, 'post-structural turn'), we should recall that 'alternative' accounting and management journals appeared and unlocked new conditions of possibility for knowledge creation. They represented a challenge to traditional perspectives and allowed for the multiplication and dissemination of original ways of conceiving organizational research. Notwithstanding that alternative research has its share of the market and that novel approaches are still emerging, enabling creative thinking and scholarly diversity, it remains the case that recent developments have undermined a number of these achievements, allowing dominant standpoints, conventional theory and conservative methodology to reassert their global authority (Grey, 2010; Murphy and Zhu, 2012). Before the excessive importance assumed by formal academic rankings, journals such as AOS (Accounting, Organizations and Society), CPA (Critical Perspectives on Accounting) and AAAJ (Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal) were usually seen as legitimate, *vital outlets for* different forms of socially and internationally relevant research. They were otherwise linked through collaborative initiatives such as the Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Accounting (IPA) Conference. Nowadays however, many scholars (regardless of their perspective), and their PhD students, tend to draw a quality distinction between these journals, talking of AOS as being *a vital career lifeline* due to its top-ranked status, and, more critically, often judging other outlets to be of lower interest, value and significance. This is indeed a regrettable and reductive approach. Instead, we would need a somewhat, if not much, broader outlook.

5. Struggling for a more genuine liminal experience

Doctoral training supposedly aims "to prepare a student for a lifetime of intellectual inquiry" (Council of Graduate Schools, 1995, p. 1). It is a significant inaugural stage in the construction of the academic self. Doctoral education is the basic foundation upon which university careers, and in turn, knowledge production, develop, evolve and eventually come to inspire – through writings and education – generations to come (Giacalone and Thompson, 2006). As an education landmark for which the highest standards are meant to be in place (Hodge, 1995), the PhD program and scholarly life should stress *empowerment* and make students strive for greater social understanding and welfare. Instead, the emphasis is often placed on personal, institutional, and professional goals (Adler and Harzing, 2009; Starbuck, 2006), which tend to imprison students in careerist, self-centered interests from Day 1 of the doctoral curriculum, when the tenure clock starts ticking. Rather than focusing on endowing students with a greater level of consciousness through deeper reflection and debate, this 'skewed mind-set' (Giacalone, 2009) encourages them, somewhat uncritically, to take what is seen as the safest or the quickest route to success (even though it may not turn out to be such).

In the liminal rituals discussed by Victor Turner, initiates were confronted by thought-provoking artifacts which often proved to be multi-vocal objects used to encourage both contemplation and reflection on the taken-for-granted factors of existence. There was "a promiscuous intermingling and juxtaposing of the categories of events, experience, and knowledge, with a pedagogic intention" (1967, p. 106). For the mind needs to be startled, stimulated, challenged and encouraged to consider the as-yet-incompletely thinkable conditions, arrangements and potentials of the self and the social world. New understandings, views and ideas have to be nurtured, 'incubated', brought forth and reified. From this perspective, people cannot be forced to be productive, insightful, original and creative; rather, one has to come to some realization of how one's thought processes may be exercised in order to be reflexive, inquiring and empowered (Bargar and Duncan, 1982).

While training in methodology is a reasonable and inescapable didactic concern in doctoral education, emphasis should rather be placed on the teaching of theory and ethics classes (e.g., epistemology, social and organizational theory, ethics education) through which PhD students are exposed to a plurality of subjects, multiple views and different accounts of reality. More time should be allocated right from the start to study paradigms and realize the fragmented state of the business academic environment and its contradictions/controversies so that we can position ourselves knowingly, instead of merely reproduce, enact and carry the dominant discourses and practices of the field. We should learn to juggle between theories and between theory and practice to promote width and height, creative thinking and the development of ideas. While liminality is a 'stage of reflection' which is conservative *in its form* (Turner, 1967, 1969), it is through the personal and idiosyncratic appropriation of arcane knowledge (both topical and institutional) that students are empowered, forced and encouraged to think critically about society, academia, knowledge creation, the

self, and the pattern of relationships among them. Institutional pressures for swift graduation and publication are denuding the essence of the rite of doctoral initiation, and the risk is of locking oneself into a consistent line of action from which it would be very costly, in time and effort, to change if it were to come into conflict with the student's underlying beliefs, values and convictions (Adler and Harzing, 2009). Or worse, to discourage consideration of, if not outright ignore, the fabulous minds and contributions that are at risk of being lost to accounting and management research (e.g., in the case of those who were made to believe that there was no room for emancipation or alternative perspectives to the dominant ones).

While such calls for an alternative emphasis in doctoral training may seem exotic to readers living in countries or regions where the teaching and the learning of epistemology (or the sociology of science) is a primary constituent of doctoral training, it has to be stressed that the studied PhD program made no demand for such a provision (i.e., the epistemology course was optional). Likewise, organization theory, which is in my view another essential fundamental that any business doctoral student should acquire, was not mandatory. The curriculum was allowing prospective scholars to move forward while avoiding theory courses known to be intellectually demanding (sometimes a little esoteric or thought-provoking) and time consuming (some of them required up to 30 h of work a week). Rather than being structured from a temporal standpoint to organize and promote 'productive' work and make sure that students progressed in a timely manner, the Collaboration Plan would have benefited from greater requirements regarding theory and ethics classes as a means of increasing the significance of both learning and knowledge development processes. Admittedly, such an administrative plan could simply be abolished and the PhD students trusted to engage with theory and develop reflexivity while fulfilling their own aspirations. However, this may also increase the risk of students being 'lost in transition' (the attrition rate of doctoral students in North America is as high as 50 per cent: Council of Graduate Schools, 2004; Bair and Haworth, 2005). What is clear is that the stake is too great not to ask future 'doctors of philosophy' to expand their theoretical and analytical scope. The student's own empowerment as well as the focus and trajectory of the research field depend on it. What ultimate orientation do we want for accounting and management research? Is it on a continuum destined to become a self-centered discipline too preoccupied by specialization and technicality, or at a crossroad at which a plurality of influences and perspectives are able to meet? The objective and consequence of doctoral education is, in my view, to offer a partial answer to these questions.

The epistemology class of our PhD Program, which was only attended by two doctoral students, was a place of reflection and debate about the inherently phenomenological conditions and potentials of the social sciences. Despite the increasing demands in terms of methodological rigor, research endeavors are fundamentally imbued in value preferences and positions. Those of the researcher, which are both a strength and a weakness (i.e., a motivating force as well as a risk of potential prejudice), and those of the social agents we study through individual, collective or structural phenomena. One of the purposes of the course was to help us increase our analytical detachment from the self and the social world, and to reach a deeper understanding of our own human condition, not least by gaining a greater theoretical control over the formation of our own structures and dispositions. It represented a *sine qua non* for intellectual emancipation and empowerment that made it easier to cast a critical and penetrating gaze on knowledge production and society (see, e.g., Bourdieu, 1984). Similarly, the organization theory class invited the students to think about the socio-historico-economic developments of business study, while promoting reflexivity, trans-disciplinarity and multi-vocality. We had to make sense of different ways of constructing accounts of reality which questioned, challenged and eventually matured our own ontological perspectives; to consider tentative theoretical frameworks for our thesis by connecting several disciplines, lenses or metaphors. The emphasis was on deconstructing the taken for granted and on building conceptual bridges for cultivating creativity, originality and variety. However, by reaching only a small share (i.e., less than one-quarter) of the doctoral student cohort, these attempts had arguably a somewhat limited impact. Accordingly, I believe that one of the levers to act upon and against the main representation of academic success, and in turn, influence the shape and development of accounting and management research, comes from adjusting the curriculum of PhD (and also Masters') programs, so that students would be exposed to reflexive sociological and extensive organizational knowledge. It would provide them with broader intellectual resources, and hopefully give them a greater inclination (or perhaps disinclination[5]) toward scholarly diversity, thought-provoking assumptions or innovative processes of knowledge creation. This has to be seen as a way of presenting to the students different ways of thinking about social life, and as a consequence, social science, which may echo with their individual beliefs, dispositions and biographies. The larger the conditions of possibility, the more people can accomplish themselves rather than repressing their professional and intellectual aspirations, and eventually leave the field of research, frustrated and disillusioned.

6. Conclusion

I willingly concede that my narrative attempts to substitute one academic dividing line (i.e., successful vs. unsuccessful) for another (i.e., creative vs. conformist) in an effort to introduce discourses alternative to the dominant

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[5] This approach may generate more distaste than taste for students who specifically entered business academia to conduct large database, archival driven research work using quantitative methods; however, the purpose is to expose PhD students to a greater diversity and plurality, not to 'replace one truth with another'.

ones. Faced with shifting standards, we (i.e. doctoral students and younger researchers) should not lose sight of the set of values we want to promote for ourselves, and under which we would have a preference for being judged and considered. Too much attention is given to cultivating the so-called rigor(ism) of research, which serves and acts as a technocratic form of control on knowledge production by means of formulaic rhetoric and greater sophistication in the presentation of 'evidence'. This is notably valid for both quantitative and qualitative research. Noteworthy, critical theory itself (i.e., critical management studies) is allegedly becoming more uniform and elitist, with recognized legitimate ways for it to be undertaken which can readily appear "as lack of openness to alternative perspectives" (Hartmann, 2013, p. 10). For a doctoral student like me, although I would like to think I am not naïve – I recognize the ongoing claim for the international legitimation of disciplinary research, the normalizing power of institutional pressures and the need to draw quality distinctions across people's work –, it was rather disconcerting to see how the social milieu, and its emphasis on the excellence of knowledge creation, seemed so wary about intellectual diversity, or at least adverse to innovative ways of building theory or of constructing accounts of reality. While this could reflect a general tendency directed at strengthening a 'unique' expertise, viewed as being central to the foundation and sustainability of an autonomous profession (see Fournier, 2000, for a general argument on professions), the risk in the long run for accounting and management research is nonetheless to lack scholarly innovation and attractiveness, to consume itself through excessive self-referencing, and to shrink and decline.

In this regard, the intention of the present essay is one of encouraging eclecticism for its capacity to mitigate, counteract and perhaps overcome the effects of both standardization and specialization pressures increasingly pervading the academic field. Rather than being instilled that research endeavors located beyond the dominant topics, methods, views, formats of writing or outlets represent risky behavior for any one that wants a shot at a successful career, we need to open more possibilities, right from the start of a scholarly career (and the requisite doctoral education), for alternative ways of thinking about knowledge production. By questioning the status quo and breaking away from intellectual orthodoxy, the PhD student's perspective will hopefully result in a new discursive power being brought into being and expressed through more innovative and original research. It is not essential to be critically ground-breaking, highly radical or visibly strident (Hartmann, 2013). Just as mundane but repeated and homogenous practices, discourses and assumptions are structuring the field and reproducing its dominant logic, emancipative and routine actions of micro-resistance should also be capable, in the aggregate, of influencing the shape and trajectory of accounting and management research. It should be recognized that numerous ways exist to increase the plurality of subjects, challenge the prevailing rationales or enhance scholarly and public debates. These include grasping social life through trans-disciplinary and multi-vocal points of view (connecting diverse literatures, ideas or perspectives); questioning taken for granted dividing lines often based on 'objective' biological differences (e.g., male/female, young/aged, generation-Y/-X/baby-boomers, etc.); shedding light on not readily disclosed issues; giving a platform for silenced or marginalized voices (e.g., temporary workers, foreign employees, minority stakeholders, etc.); studying what one fervently believes in and values (e.g., business ethics, accounting for the environment, etc.); or any combination of the above. Workshops on creativity in the process of choosing a research subject or problem, or even simple social interaction, can be used as a means of conveying alternative dialogs to the dominant discourses and practices in force. Bridges with non-business and management disciplines should be made to support innovation and create spillover effects between approaches which otherwise seldom meet. It is also possible to promote the practice of getting external views on our research papers by asking for non-binding improvement suggestions from other social science researchers. Further, we can work more closely, not only with private firms but also with public organizations. Governments, policy makers and NGOs are legitimate stakeholders hopefully more inclined to listen to diversity and to carry critical, humanistic and societal purposes. Similarly, we should keep pushing established journals to broaden their scope, criteria and audience, or even seek to undermine their so-called excellence status.[6] We should not too readily dismiss contributions in books and we could also decide to submit a portion of our work to open access peer-refereed journals, or try to target editors/publishers offering the largest rights over our own intellectual property and selling it back to us (to universities) at the least expensive price.[7] And so forth.[8] University life fundamentally offers the conditions of possibility to pursue novel and diverse lines of thought. However, this potential is not a given. It is neither granted nor vested; instead, it needs to be put forward and reified in processes of collective action, and be allowed to thrive through each of our everyday assumptions, behaviors and outcomes.

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[6] According to Starbuck (2005), although journal rankings create "circular causality – articles receive more citations because they appear in higher-prestige journals, and journals gain prestige because they publish articles that receive more citations" (p. 183) –, less than 10% of the most-cited articles in economics, psychology, sociology, and management are published by the top 20% of journals with the higher impact factor.

[7] In a recent article, Beverungen et al. (2012) make a case for "autonomous publishing controlled by free associations of academics and affiliated researchers, . . . a radical reappropriation of our academic labor through the simple strategy of cutting out the publishers entirely and publishing open-access, online journals directly under the control of their editorial boards" (p. 930). The authors also point out that commercial publishers yield extraordinarily high profits in the range of 30–40% and that they could further participate to the dissemination of knowledge by reducing their price or opening up more issues or journals to free access. Opening a journal to online free access does not impact the inherent value of the papers that are published in it and, on the contrary, is likely to increase the number of citations obtained as the journal would be more widely diffused.

[8] Noteworthy, recently published books (e.g., Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013b; Starbuck, 2006) and articles (e.g., Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013a; Hartmann, 2013; Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011; Suddaby et al., 2011) provide some interesting ideas for engaging in more imaginative and innovative research.

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