

Devolution of Researcher Care in Organization Studies and the Moderation of Organizational Knowledge

GAVIN M. SCHWARZ

University of New South Wales Sydney, Australia, Sydney, Australia

CHAILIN CUMMINGS

California State University at Long Beach, California

THOMAS G. CUMMINGS

University of Southern California Los Angeles, California

We critically assess how the devolution of researcher care moderates knowledge development in organization studies. Defining researcher care as what scholars are concerned and passionate about, we consider the extent to which individual researchers lose their personal voice in researching organizations. This bounding of care by the research community is a reflection of the way that researchers knowingly alter their care in researching organizations to gain associated career and reputational benefits. We describe how the field's institutional logic for researching organizations enables this devolution to take hold and how larger institutional forces reinforce how it progressively moderates organizational knowledge. We offer preliminary suggestions for addressing the devolution of researcher care in organization studies and ameliorating its threat to knowledge development.

Our interest is to understand the dynamics of researcher care in organization studies (OS), a research domain that has evolved into a large and legitimate academic field in a little over half a century. Broadly defined, OS includes all lines of inquiry having to do with organizations and organizing, encompassing such terms as administrative science, organizational science, organizational behavior, organization theory, management research, and strategic management (Palmer, 2006). In this context, *care* refers to those things researchers are concerned and passionate about in researching organizations, including particular issues, theories, and methods, and more broadly, how researchers attach themselves to knowledge, how they know, and the way they experience the world (Van Manen, 1990).

As much as theories and methods for studying organizations, researcher care contributes to the

scientific rigor, intellectual appeal, and practical relevance of OS knowledge. It influences what researchers choose to study and how they go about researching organizations. Our focus goes beyond themes and questions about the imperative to care and *focuses on organizational researcher care itself*, what organizational scholars care about in researching organizations. We are not so much concerned about the scholarship of care or on caring, which are legitimate topics in their own right, but on questioning the devolution of researcher care and its representation and consequences in OS. We see troubling signs that the norms and interests of the larger OS community are unduly subjugating researcher care. If left unchecked, the bounding of researcher care by the OS profession can place artificial strictures on OS ideas and research, resulting in moderation of the field's knowledge.

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Despite an enduring interest in the state of the field (see Clark, Floyd, & Wright, 2013; Miller, Greenwood, & Prakash, 2009; Nord, 2012), the bounding of researcher care by the OS community is not clearly articulated or openly talked about. To redress this imbalance, we seek to stimulate self-reflection, constructive dialogue, and positive action on researcher care in OS. Our concern is fundamentally different from the ones motivating broader, more reflective commentary or sense making on the OS field. These reviews tend to report on the *state of research*, variously commenting on different themes and trends or stock taking on OS, its evolution, and place in business schools (e.g., see Birkinshaw, Healey, Suddaby, & Weber, 2014; Miller et al., 2009; Suddaby, 2014). In contrast, we explore the *shape of researching* by focusing on how researchers approach their work, that is, what it means to care in doing organizational research. Our focus is the deeper purpose and personal meaning underlying researching, the way scholars understand and articulate what they care about in doing research. We build on the challenge to organizational researchers that Rynes, Bartunek, Dutton, and Margolis (2012: 30) made in their essay on compassion in organizations: “Do we care deeply enough about our phenomena?”

By extension, we explore the extent to which care involves, so that scholars restrain their personal voices and professional identities in researching organizations. Like all scientific disciplines, there are persistent yet subtle institutional pressures in OS to align the things that organizational scholars are personally concerned and passionate about in doing research with things that the larger OS community views are important and serve its interests. These institutional forces help to sustain the field’s collective identity and to promote the intellectual legitimacy and coherence of its knowledge. They foster adherence to the field’s norms and standards for doing and assessing research, and, consequently, shape the direction and boundaries of organizational knowledge. This drive for consistency between researcher care and OS community care can be beneficial for both researchers’ careers and the field’s continued success. When it becomes excessive in favor of the OS community, however, unintended negative consequences can occur. We

argue that the conversion of researcher care to community care can lead to extreme forms of careerism and opportunism, in which researchers transform what they care about in researching organizations into things that promise career returns, such as fashionable topics, journal status, and citation counts. This can progressively moderate the field’s knowledge development by restricting the intellectual variation and exploration needed to create new ideas and lines of inquiry, which can lead to excessive exploitation of the field’s knowledge, creating gradually diminishing returns.

We begin by defining care and delineating the process of devolution of researcher care in an OS context. We then articulate the larger institutional forces shaping the field that contribute to the excessive bounding of researcher care by the OS community. We next describe the unintended negative consequences of this devolution of researcher care, and conclude with preliminary proposals for achieving a better balance between researcher care and OS community care.

CARE AND THE DEVOLUTION PROCESS

Care is fundamental to our individual identity, who we are, and how others perceive us. With a strong grounding in philosophy, theology, and welfare, care generally embraces compassion, a desire to help or to intervene, and of taking responsibility. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines care as “to feel concern (great or little), be concerned, trouble oneself, feel interest” (Oxford University Press, 2002, *emphasis added*). Tsui (2013a) went further by incorporating *passion* into her description of care. Combining these definitions, we adopt Frankfurt’s (1982) conceptualization of care as something that is important to the individual, something that the individual is concerned *and* passionate about. Care is intrinsically personal and subjective. It frames what information people attend to and what meaning they attach to it (Miller & Sardais, 2013). People care about something because they identify it as important, are devoted to it, or have an intense enthusiasm for it, which, in turn, makes them “vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits” (Frankfurt, 1982: 260). From a phenomenological view, care is non-teleological. It evokes deeper aspects of the inner self and encompasses a sense of ownership for something a person identifies as important, meaningful, and valuable—regardless of context.

In OS, care applies to all forms of research, from replicating previous research, to working on

specialized problems, to making fundamental breakthroughs. It can influence choices about what issues or problems to study and what theories and methods to apply to them. Given these strong decisional effects, we are surprised that OS has paid so little attention to researcher care. Instead, emphasis has been placed on broad themes and outcomes related to care per se, viewing it primarily as a commodity or a social interaction related to the functioning of organizations and their members (see Rynes et al., 2012 for a comprehensive summary). Organizational researchers have observed, reported, and proposed narratives on care rather than engage in serious self-reflection on care in doing organizational research (Adler & Hansen, 2012). They have theorized about care and its outcomes while giving little consideration for care in the context of their own research choices and acts of researching.

Yet, issues of researcher care tacitly underlie persistent debate about OS knowledge development and standards for judging research (such as between Pfeffer, 1993, and Van Maanen, 1995, or by Nonaka, 1994; Starbuck, 2006; Van de Ven, 2007). Researcher care is implicitly related to recurrent concerns for how the sheer quantity of organizational research has become more important than its quality, challenging what we do (e.g., Bartunek & Rynes, 2010; Hitt & Greer, 2012); how OS researchers create knowledge mainly for other researchers, challenging research's practical relevance (e.g., Markides, 2007; Tsui, 2013b); and how theory building has been neglected, challenging the field's future intellectual foundations (e.g., Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013; Miller et al., 2009). Even in these instances when researcher care is highly relevant to challenges facing OS, it has played only a tangential role in assessing the field's problems and proposing solutions. Care has been more a topic for doing organizational research than something for OS to reflect on or to cultivate.

Our concern with the relationship between researcher care and OS community care is illustrative of the inherent tension between individuals' needs and those of the social collectives they join. People face persistent yet subtle pressures to align the things they are personally concerned and passionate about with things that the collective views are important and serve its interests. This divide is normal. Balancing the tension between individual and collective interests is essential for the maintenance and development of the collective and the satisfaction and commitment of its members. In OS,

it can enable researchers to pursue their own concerns and passions while adhering to the collective norms and practices for creating and assessing knowledge and developing a common knowledge base. When researcher care naturally aligns with that of the OS community, conformity to community norms is simply an expression of researchers' intrinsic concern and passion in doing organizational research. When there is misalignment, however, researcher compliance with community interests reflects the ceding of individual care to the OS community. Then, researching can become unnatural or artificial—not a true expression of what researchers care about in studying organizations.

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The OS community does not necessarily force or impose its definition of care on organizational researchers, but they willingly accede to it. Choosing to amend one's researching may be in line with researchers' career aspirations and desires to be part of a larger, professional community. It can reflect a belief in the need to conform to the OS community's interests to gain associated career benefits (Tuchman, 2009). Thus, willingness to alter care involves researchers' reactions to careerism and opportunism, and not the fact of their existence. Following Whitley's (1984: 25) definition of an academic field as a "reputational work organization," organizational researchers generally attend to the status of their scholarship in the OS community. They can become overly concerned with how relevant others, such as journal editors and referees, judge their work rather than with staking a claim for it based on its felt importance. Researchers may then feel a sense of urgency and eagerness to redirect their care to benefit from the returns of academic success, which can be substantial in the OS field. Researchers then do research that is not necessarily important to *them*, but which they deem essential for professional success.

Organizational researchers also may readily amend their care to fit the interests of the OS field due to an abiding need to be part of a broader, scholarly community. Academic community can

matter to OS researchers because, despite the richness that differences in knowledge and expertise bring, we have been socialized to appreciate that “the hallmark of effective knowledge refinement and exploration is a tight network among researchers” (March 2005: 8). Moreover, the OS community, like family, religion, and friendships, may be an integral part of researchers’ broader social network that guides and supports them and contributes to their social identity. Based on this core value of community, researchers may willingly bond with the OS community, even while recognizing that they might have to alter their caring to fit in.

In choosing to cede care to the OS community, whether for career or social purposes, researchers readily conform to the community’s norms and practices. Because academic fields’ institutional contexts shape and give meaning to those norms, the devolution of researcher care is a reflection of those larger forces.

INSTITUTIONAL FORCES SHAPING DEVOLUTION OF CARE

Academic fields’ institutional contexts strongly affect their intellectual identity, scientific legitimacy, and choices about what topics to study, methods to use, and standards to assess knowledge. Because the devolution of researcher care is based on compliance to what the field defines as “good research” and a “competent researcher,” these institutional forces shape the content of the devolution process and the way it unfolds in a research community.

In OS, the institutional forces driving the bounding of researcher care are grounded in Reichenbach’s (1938) fundamental distinction between the “context of justification” and the “context of discovery” in science. The *context of justification* has to do with verifying or falsifying existing theory and knowledge. It centers on positivist approaches to science: Researchers attempt to validate existing theory empirically and infer general principles from observations of specific instances. In contrast, the *context of discovery* is concerned with theorizing: the process of creating and enhancing theory and exploring alternative explanations for existing findings. It is highly subjective and involves a good deal of whimsy, inspiration, and creativity. As Swedberg (2012) argued for the social sciences in general, OS is grounded primarily in the context of justification, while the context of discovery is ignored or even devalued. This has yoked organizational research to the verification of knowledge, as exemplified by what Bennis and O’Toole (2005) referred to as “the

scientific model.” OS’s emphasis on justification is reflected in the field’s proclivity to “emulate the methods of the ‘mature’ sciences, irrespective of the propriety of such practices” (Parkhe, 1993: 244). This willingness is apparent in OS’s proficiency in methods and analytical techniques, the plethora of well-executed studies in its journals, and the relative absence of theoretically compelling articles. Justification is evident in the high degree to which positivist methods predict citation and publication trends in the field (e.g., Judge, Cable, Colbert, & Rynes, 2007). It is displayed in OS’s deep concern for scientific rigor and protecting the field from frivolous, unscientific, or fraudulent research, evidenced in the current interest in academic misconduct (e.g., Bedeian, Taylor, & Miller, 2010; Clair, 2014).

The context of justification offers a normative prescription for organizational researching. It operates and produces effects through its central role in defining the “institutional logic” (Alford & Friedland, 1985) that guides the OS field and gives direction and meaning to researchers’ decisions, behaviors, and interactions. *Institutional logics* are the socially constructed pattern of practices, beliefs, and rules, both formal and informal, by which individuals create their social reality and give substance and meaning to it (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). In OS, this institutional sense making emphasizes shared values and norms for researching organizations. The field’s institutional logic, grounded in the context of justification (hereafter called “justification logic”), provides scholars with a collective identity of what it means to be an organizational researcher, providing a shared frame for understanding what kinds of problems should be studied, how research should be conducted, and what standards should be used to judge knowledge claims (Augier & March 2011; Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010; Kellogg, 2011).

In this sense, the devolution of researcher care mimics an isomorphic outcome familiar to institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). It involves a convergence of social approval pressures to secure survival benefits, such as reputation and career success. Accordingly, the OS community serves a symbolic role in the alignment of individual care to community care. This institutional pressure does not discount that researchers focus on essential issues or explore ideas that they care about, but it highlights their skewing toward OS community definitions of caring. It is as if there is a sense of compliance as researchers reinforce a logic of justification, which imposes more compliance to belong to the OS community. Peer assessment reinforces

this logic as organizational researchers strive to create a meaningful social identity around being an “academic researcher,” which is a peer-evaluated and community-corroborated outcome, as Wilhite and Fong (2012) noted in how we cite publications, Day (2011) pointed out for the effects of manuscript rejection, and Corley (2010) reflected on tenure.

Because institutional logics are well learned and taken for granted, they can affect individuals’ feelings, cognitions, and behaviors in powerful yet imperceptible ways. OS’s justification logic is the central force in determining how the devolution of researcher care has evolved in the field and moved research and knowledge development in an increasingly moderating direction. It has enabled the field to bound what organizational researchers care about in doing research in three mutually reinforcing ways: (1) the functionality of researching (i.e., the way we research); (2) the academic system (i.e., the career pressures we face); and (3) the reconstruction of interest (i.e., the altered research focus we adopt).

The Functionality of Researching

Researching in OS has evolved to become a community-led functional activity. As Porter and McKibbin (1988) observed in their commentary on the field, the nature of this scholarship is characterized by a focus on publication quantity, an overwhelming interest in contributing to academic debate, and a tendency to build on established theory. It represents a regulated process in which researchers seek to align their care with that of the OS community based on particular strategies for researching. This response is not surprising given the evolution of the field toward more of a science-based approach, with a reliance on rigorous, quantitative research (Ghoshal, 2005; Palmer, 2006). It is functional to the extent that the primary focus of research has shifted from *understanding* based on individual concern and passion to *proficiency* in knowledge production, with its consequences evident in recent laments about the state of theory development in the organizational sciences (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013; Ferris, Hochwarter, & Buckley, 2012). In contrast to discovery-based knowledge creation, as Schwarz and Stensaker (2014) detail, OS research has primarily become a functional process characterized by researchers who are good at researching, knowledgeable about the publishing “game,” and able to win at it. This functionality is a way of confirming and accumulating knowledge. For instance, Hitt and Greer (2012) pointed out that

although there is an increasingly debilitating devotion to the way we research, this functionality has given rise to systems and practices that have increased the quality and impact of OS research, indicative in the breadth and scope of the field.

Research functionality can operate like a form of Malthusianism, however, to create never-ending lists of “theoretical contributions” based variously on continuous knowledge production (Starbuck, 2006), belief in the value of theory (Shapira, 2011), the importance of the art of scholarship (Miller et al., 2009), and the quest for professional accountability (Tuchman, 2009). Alvesson and Sandberg (2014) illustrate this functionality in their summary of the pressures leading to narrowed research. They argue that OS is increasingly “boxed in” by narrowly circumscribed areas of study, encouraging specialization and incremental work. Ironically, commonly portrayed features of good research may actually limit novel ideas and frame-breaking theory. At the heart of this institutional functionality is a focus on promoting research to fit into “a specific (sub)community by heavily investing in its members and creating a specific research profile...” (p. 970). With a focus on functionality and investing in a research profile, and while the field is stronger for it (Augier, March, & Sullivan, 2005), researcher care is more easily fitted into an academic career delineated by the OS community.

Key to the role of functionality in bounding researcher care is an emphasis on career goals over scholarship (Bennis & O’Toole, 2005), representing an increasing focus on the process of knowledge production by way of a consensus-seeking and an add-to-the-literature norm. Essential to this outcome is the OS field’s adoption of an inward-looking research perspective. What we define as “good” research mostly reflects this domestication; research that is corroborated by our peers who publish our ideas, and thus, advance our careers. Hence, research functionality rests heavily on engaging other organizational researchers. To contribute to OS debate, researchers need to become participants in this community-led functionality, which is especially noticeable in the methodological pressures in what and how we publish. For example, Franco et al. (2014) recently indicated in their study of publication outcomes funded by the National Science Foundation that nearly two thirds of the social science studies that produced null results were not even written up, but remained as working papers in the “file drawer,” based on the author’s belief about the possibility of negative peer reaction. Through this

type of self-censorship, selective reporting increases the chances of Type I errors, with 96% of the studies showing statistically significant results submitted for publication. Similarly, Starbuck (2006) and Nord (2012) described a variant of how functionality in research trumps outcomes and the research findings themselves. They illustrated how the predominance of null-hypothesis significance testing has been increasingly misapplied in OS by being used to indicate the *importance* of observed effects. The irony of this functionality is that, despite its limitations for individual researcher care, it still facilitates valuable research.

For OS, this focus on scientific methods has helped to formalize the research process and to verify the field's knowledge. The field has developed a strong intellectual identity within the social sciences, along with its own journals, professional associations, and parochialisms. In an apparent reversal of what knowledge and knowledge building represent (Van Manen, 1990), however, catering to OS community interests has come to dominate what researchers consider is valuable research. Consequently, individual researcher care is more restricted, and the importance of the field as a source of new ideas suffers (as Augier & March 2011, detail).

Central to the functionality of researching's effect on the bounding of researcher care is the artificiality of this constraint, as researchers willingly comply with OS's justification logic and the limits it imposes on their inquiry. By choice, organizational researchers have come to rely on knowledge verification to define the functionality of their research. This underplays the little zigs and zags that come from discovering something unexpected or investing in time-consuming work. Having developed the institutional practices that now govern us methodologically, Nord (2012: 443) observed that "we barely even question their efficacy," because the quest for professional acceptance is a stronger force in determining research choices.

All of this provides an inviting milieu for the de-volution of researcher care to take hold. The result is an increasingly structured domain built around the attractiveness of the concept rather than the outcome (Bort & Kieser, 2011), the regular presentation of specific areas of research as "interesting," which suggests that the area is worth researching (see Oliver, 2010), and the misplaced presentation of basic ideas as applied (see Locke & GoldenBiddle, 1997). Rather than look for new puzzles, we tend to manipulate the ill-fitting puzzle pieces already in hand because that is what we are proficient at doing

and what the field rewards. In this way, the functionality of OS research tends to bind individual researcher care to the field's dominant institutional logic, given the perceived career consequences of not progressing knowledge in this manner.

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The Academic System

A second source of institutional pressure driving researchers to cede care to the OS community norms is the academic system, particularly the business schools that house organizational researchers and the doctoral programs that train and initially socialize them. Business schools have traditionally nurtured OS, providing organizational researchers with generous resources, access to organizations, and freedom to develop a unique knowledge base (Augier & March 2011). Along with this support have come influences on organizational research that mirror the evolution of business schools, particularly in the United States. In the late 1950s, influential reports by the Carnegie Foundation (Pierson, 1959) and Ford Foundation (Gordon & Howell, 1959) criticized the poor quality of business school research and called for rigorous, scientific inquiry. In response, many business schools located in research universities invested time, energy, and funding into reversing these trends, with a growing focus on scientific knowledge production (Corley & Gioia, 2011). Contemporary forces have reinforced business schools' drive toward scientific respectability, including growing competition to attract the best faculty and students, greater importance of school rankings, and increased hiring of faculty from the social science disciplines (Cummings, 2011). While all of this has contributed to business schools' scientific knowledge, it also has promoted an instrumental approach to research driven by the need to publish in top academic journals to gain scholarly reputation. For instance, Baum (2012), like Newman and Cooper (1993) before him, found that organizational researchers increasingly seek to publish in a few select journals and frequently cite the same subset of articles and authors. The material payoffs for productive faculty,

in promotion and tenure, salary, teaching load, and research support, can be considerable. The stringencies of this system can become an intellectual straightjacket, however, encouraging conservatism in what is studied and how we think about research (Fabian, 2000; Giacalone, 2009).

In an ironic twist to the exploratory ethos of science, the academic system's focus on rigorous empirical inquiry has bolstered OS's justification logic, which in turn, has driven organizational researchers to seek more and more peer recognition and career advancement. These scholarly norms and practices have progressively limited individual researcher care, bounding it by those of the aggregate. This not only tempers researcher concern and passion in doing organizational research, but shifts attention from the research process itself to the academic system that supports it. It can result in a form of care that favors researchers who value research production (i.e., publication) and low-risk scholarship over those who intrinsically value researching and discovery (Courpasson, 2013; Tsui, 2013b). It also can lead to the "homogenization of scholarship" (Tsui, 2013b: 378), in which focusing on a set of particular journals and competing for the top ranks in a list of what is considered productive research narrow what is considered "appropriate" scholarship. Thus, directed by publication guides (Nkomo, 2009), data restrictions (Miller et al., 2009), career impacts (Day, 2011), and an increasing need for recognition (Newman & Cooper, 1993), researching to publish can divert attention from what researchers are concerned and passionate about in researching organizations.

Similarly, the academic system can contribute to the devolution of researcher care through doctoral training. OS doctoral programs, which are located mainly in business schools, can propagate the field's justification logic and associated instrumental approach to research. Course content, criteria for passing qualifying examinations and defending dissertations, assignments to research projects, mentoring advice, and informal socialization practices powerfully signal what topics, theories, and methods are valued in OS and likely to result in top-tier publications. These educational elements can reinforce the instrumentality of OS research as the path to publication, academic employment, and early career success. For example, doctoral students may postpone graduation or take one of the growing numbers of postdoctorate positions in business schools to accrue a publication record sufficient to obtain a respected faculty appointment. OS doctoral education also can gradually restrict what students care about in

researching organizations, much like medical training does to prospective doctors who progressively lose their idealism and passion for medicine to the institutional pressures of medical education and patient care (Becker & Geer, 1958; Haas & Shaffir, 1984). Surprisingly, the narrowing of OS students' care is most likely to occur in top-ranked doctoral programs, which generally use a specialized or discipline-based approach to train research neophytes (Mudambi, Hannigan, & Kline, 2012). Disciplinary training provides theoretical and methodological acumen in a particular field, yet can contribute to growing criticism that organizational researchers have become narrow specialists and business schools insulated fortresses that lack pluralism (e.g., Ghoshal, 2005).

The academic system's significant influence on the attenuation of researcher care is evident in such recurrent issues as the generation of a "culture of written productivity" (Courpasson, 2013), the strong arm of "U.S. models" on academe (Calas & Smircich, 2013), the "audit culture" (Tuchman, 2009), citation clubs and impact factor effects (Prichard, 2013), the "performance anxiety" of ranking and evaluating researchers and their schools (Mingers & Willmott, 2013), and the business side of publishing (Beverungen, Bohm, & Land, 2012). As organizational researchers' interests diverge from what they are personally concerned and passionate about, research proficiency supplants the depth of OS research. The popularity of the research question, the rigor of the methods, and the value-added of the outcomes then become default measures of interest and contribution. This, of course, can pose a difficult dilemma for organizational researchers. How can researchers whose care diverges from that of the OC community build a career around what they care about without necessarily being compliant to the field's norms? Alternatively, if these types of academic pressures are now the norm, to what extent do they suppress or change individual researcher care in ways that impair the field's knowledge development?

Given the growth in OS research, doctoral programs, and journals, and the associated increase in the number of researchers, the issue is not one of knowledge production or its dissemination. Rather, it is of theoretical leverage, obscured scholarship, and downplaying bold discovery, based on changes to the academic job and, by association, to scholarship. As Palmer (2006) concluded for 50 years of research published in *Administrative Science Quarterly* and Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan (2007) for 5 decades of research published in the *Academy of Management Journal*, the academic system

exerts strong normative controls for organizational researchers to restate what is already known, repackaging it in new or different terminology. Organizational researcher care may come to reflect an aggregated response to what is necessary for the field and its home in business schools, rather than what is primary to the individual's intrinsic concern and passion. At that point, we may end up researching to publish, satisfying our need to belong to the academy.

Reconstructing Interest

A third institutional influence on the bounding of researcher care involves interesting research. Early in OS's development, both discovery and justification guided knowledge creation, with individual researchers' ideas having a strong hand in determining what "interesting" research is to the field (see Agarwal & Hoetker, 2007; Augier & March 2011). Gradually, as a justification logic took hold and became the field's primary template for research, idea refinement displaced idea creation as the main determinate of interesting (and publishable) research, and the field's definition of interesting research came to dominate that of the individual researcher. These changes in the referent for determining interesting research can stifle researchers' concern and passion for exploring ideas and phenomena for their own sake, thus reducing variation in what is important to study. Without the unfettered exploration stimulated by individual researcher care, OS risks painting itself into a limited conceptual corner, ironically based on good empirical scholarship. While some deny that pressures for interesting research are an intrinsic problem (see Hitt & Greer, 2012 for commentary), evidence suggests that the field's strong focus on methodological rigor can suppress individual researcher care and the idea creation that it kindles (e.g., Adler & Harzing, 2009; Bort & Kieser, 2011). Alvesson and Sandberg (2013: 15) argued that the common journal convention of "a lengthy method section indicating rationality and rigor" suggests that OS's positivist roots flourish. This default has become the professional norm, resulting in what has come to be defined as an interesting empirical paper, and hence what researchers need to care about. Even the hard sciences have begun to debate the rigor requirements and restrictions of normal science and the conservatism that they invoke (see Charlton, 2009; Stephan, 2012).

Of course, this restriction on researcher care does not necessarily limit challenges to consensus or to the rigor or quality of the associated research.

Nevertheless, it can alter researcher care to adhere primarily to knowledge extension and instrumentalism. Corley and Gioia (2011) argued that the primary focus on quantifiable knowledge development has created a closed community of OS scholars, limiting dialogue and inquiry to a subset of known phenomena. The increasing importance of a contribution ethos to the field's scholarly identity reinforces this outcome. Like Brief's (2003) *Academy of Management Review* editorial, most leading OS journals have explicit editorial statements that center on the importance of making a contribution. While laudable and necessary, when read in the context of the pressures to reinforce the field's research norms, journals can inadvertently bound individual researcher care by generating detailed definitions of what is a contribution, its scope, conditions, and requirements. This is evident in the growing number of editorial comments appearing in journals giving publication advice to potential submitters.

As a research community, OS is progressively engrossed with knowledge built on this defensive reasoning mind-set. By default, the field's entrenched objective is to defend mostly established frames or to recontextualize concepts. Thus, OS is preoccupied with discussions about the philosophy of science and the virtues of different styles of mapping knowledge. Well trained in how to do functional research and socialized and rewarded by the academic system, the devolution of researcher care is sustained by the "gamesman" researcher (Miller, 2007), who progressively focuses on output or citations along with the associated professional opportunities and career recognition, which become a focal interest. This emphasis can skew researcher care in ways that we may not necessarily appreciate or understand.

CONSEQUENCES OF DEVOLUTION OF RESEARCHER CARE

Together, the institutional forces shaping the devolution of researcher care in OS—the functionality of researching, the academic system, and the reconstruction of interest—reveal the paradox inherent in its outcomes. By many accounts, the OS field is strong and growing, its institutional base flourishing, its knowledge progressing (see Agarwal & Hoetker, 2007). OS's justification logic is a rational path toward the development and maturation of an academic field, as it has been in many other sciences. Adhering to the field's definition of care can advance researchers' reputational status and careers. It can be a genuine source of caring in researching

organizations. What then is the problem with the devolution of researcher care?

Paradoxically, OS's growing strength can restrict its potential for knowledge development. It can lead to gradual moderation of the field's research, characterized by knowledge that is generated more by community interests than by individual researcher initiative, more risk averse than path breaking, and more reliant on external validation than on individual researcher judgment. Moderated knowledge is a natural outcome of the devolution of researcher care and the attendant narrowing of choices that researchers make about topics, theories, and methods. We described powerful institutional pressures for organizational researchers to limit these decisions to what the OS community sees as important, hence to what will contribute to researchers' recognition and career progress. A case in point is how the primary reference group for organizational researchers has become almost exclusively other academics (Gabriel, 2010; Miller et al., 2009). Research choices then represent a scripted approach to decision making (Gioia & Manz, 1985), in which researchers instinctively learn to privilege the research interests of the OS community over their own interests. It can lead to a gradual shift in goal orientation from mastery to performance, with a related change in motivation from intrinsic learning to extrinsic demonstration of research competence to relevant others (e.g., Deci, 1971; Kaplan & Maehr, 2007). This change in goals and motivation reflects the transformation of researcher care from unmitigated passion to professional obligation. It can compel researchers to engage in the kinds of knowledge moderation described in critiques of OS's scholarship such as theory borrowing (e.g., Whetten, Felin, & King, 2009); gap spotting (e.g., Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011); domesticating contributions (e.g., Corley & Gioia, 2011); inbreeding (e.g., Calas & Smircich, 1990); politics of publishing (e.g., Baruch & Hall, 2004); and never-ending faddishness (Starbuck, 2006, 2009). Perhaps more ominous to OS knowledge development, research that is unduly oriented to performance goals and extrinsic motivations can be prone to unethical research behavior (Van Yperen, Hamstra, & van der Klauw, 2011).

When researchers place OS community interests above their own in researching organizations, they risk pushing aside or repressing the subjectivity that is fundamental to the scientific ethos. Researcher subjectivity, the central feature of researcher care, promotes curiosity and interest built around some

form of idea ownership. When this personal core of researching is overly constrained, ideas may be created and persist because the academic community rather than the individual researcher values them. We then can imagine a future in OS dominated by results and the artifacts of researching, but in which organizational researchers progressively lose their personal voice in the broader community.

The irony of all of this is clear when taken in the context of the deep sense of personal ownership and subjective value that characterize caring as non-teleological concern and passion for its own sake. When seen this way, questions about whether the field has "lost its way" (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013); is "adrift" (Walsh, Meyer, & Schoonhoven, 2006); is "decreasing in value" (Pearce & Huang, 2012); or is at "an interesting crossroads" (Davis & Marquis, 2005) are all appealing in the sense that OS is at a comfortable stage of evolution, with acknowledged needs for further development. In response, common discourse has tended to debate and search for solutions to the state of OS (e.g., Miller et al., 2009); criticize the logic of the argument (e.g., Calas & Smircich, 1990); or shoot the messenger (e.g., Aldag, 2012). Yet underpinning this appeal to questioning the OS field can be a clear loss or neglect of the personal concern and passion underlying researcher care. In turn, it can miss the fundamental imperative that when researcher care devolves to broader community interests, attention needs to be paid to OS knowledge development.

PROPOSALS FOR REDRESSING THE DEVOLUTION OF RESEARCHER CARE

All of this, of course, raises the essential question of what we can do about remedying the devolution of researcher care in OS. Finding solutions will be challenging. The bounding of researcher care is entrenched in the field's justification logic and the powerful institutional forces that shape and reinforce the devolution process. Like organization culture, this process is likely to be deep seated, taken for granted, and difficult to change. Given our interest in the deeper purpose and personal meaning of organizational researching, and because our arguments are based on supporting references, anecdotal evidence, and personal speculation, a sensible first step is to assess more systematically to what extent the devolution process actually operates in the OS field. OS has a long history of self-assessment and reflection through its primary professional association, the Academy of Management. It could conduct this

evaluation, perhaps as part of a regular, recurrent assessment of the field. Assuming the results are consistent with our appraisal, we can then formally address the question of what to do about it. We offer the following preliminary suggestions, aimed at the research community, business schools, doctoral programs, and individual researchers, to stimulate more comprehensive and systematic attention to the devolution of researcher care in OS.

At the OS community level, solutions to the devolution of researcher care need to account for the complex, systemic causes that create and reinforce it. Rather than try to significantly change the field's predominate approach to research, which seems unrealistic and likely unnecessary given OS's success, a more modest yet practical approach is to nurture and support meaningful mind-sets and initiatives that recast organizational research conventions. This could broaden the topics, theories, and methods in which researchers might legitimately invest their concern and passion, while still enabling them to sustain a meaningful relationship with the OS community. Promising examples include "engaged scholarship" that seeks to surmount the twin hurdles of scientific quality and practical impact (Van de Ven, 2007); "critical management research" that attempts to do qualitative management research with a critical edge (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000); "transdisciplinary research" that applies multiple disciplines to problem areas characterized by complexity and uncertainty (Wickson, Carew, & Russell, 2006); and "positive organizational scholarship" that studies the positive outcomes, processes, and attributes of organizations and their members (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Further efforts to expand the field's intellectual boundaries might include enhanced support for current initiatives by the Academy of Management to broaden what is viewed as "research impact" (e.g., DeNisi, 2010), support for a change in the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business' accreditation standards to account for wider aspects of researcher scholarship (e.g., AACSB, 2008), and support for a host of global institutions seeking to enlarge the definition of organizational research that is worthy of societal funding and support (e.g., BERR, 2007; ESRC, 2011). Similarly, we might give greater encouragement and support to increasing the space that journals devote to special forums or sections aimed at expanding the boundaries of OS research and to launching new journals with similar aspirations, such as the *Academy of Management Discoveries*, *Journal of Management*

Inquiry, *Organization*, and *Organization Science*, to name a few.

Business schools that house OS scholars are central to the devolution of researcher care and need to be part of its solution. Their reward systems and career practices tend to favor a justification logic, and, consequently, need to change to promote and reinforce broader definitions of researcher care and knowledge generation. Although such change is not easy due to entrenched routines and interests, positive movement in this direction deserves greater attention and support. For example, Aguinis et al. (2014) proposed a pluralistic approach to measuring and rewarding scholarly impact, in which the interests of multiple stakeholders, such as researchers, administrators, and research funders, contribute to defining, measuring, and rewarding OS knowledge. This could greatly expand the kinds of research and knowledge that business schools value and reward. Along these lines, business schools increasingly supplement traditional research career paths with careers aimed at teaching and service. Although these new career paths are not typically tenure-track, they can offer meaningful alternatives for OS scholars who choose to shift their care from research to other parts of academic life. Cummings (2011) suggested that multiple career paths also could apply to research careers, thus broadening opportunities for researcher care in traditional academic careers. OS researchers might choose between a more basic research career path and a more applied path, each with its own reward system. Researchers might move between these two paths at different points in their careers.

For most OS researchers, the devolution of researcher care begins during doctoral training. Here, nascent researchers learn the field's basic knowledge, research methods, and "rules of the game," and internalize its norms and what to care about in researching organizations. Because students tend to be highly malleable during this socialization process, promotion of a justification logic and its associated norms and practices can have strong and lasting effects on researcher care. Promising solutions to this devolution process center on providing doctoral students with the opportunity to discover their own concern and passion in researching organizations and the freedom to research accordingly. For instance, Daft (1983) proposed that learning the "craft" of OS researching needs to supplement the formal, technical aspects of researching typically emphasized in doctoral training. This requires experience and mastery of an

approach to researching that appreciates such things as surprise, emotion, common sense, and learning by doing—all things that encourage personal exploration of researcher care. Swedberg (2012) developed an approach to doctoral training in sociology built on an exploration logic, one of the most direct solutions to the devolution of researcher care in doctoral programs. It consists of two phases, which correspond to the research process: an initial theorizing or discovery phase and a major research or justification phase. Students learn discovery through observing something interesting and applying rules that emphasize intuition, imagination, and abduction; they learn justification through traditional reading and classroom activities. Like learning the craft of researching, learning the theorizing or discovery phase of researching can help doctoral students clarify and enact their own concerns and passions in organizational researching.

Notwithstanding strong institutional pressures to cede researcher care to the OS community, the decision about what to invest care in researching organizations ultimately rests with the individual researcher. Each of us makes choices about what issues to study and what theories and methods will gain insight into them. Because these decisions are personal and inherently subjective, an initial step in addressing the devolution issue is for individual researchers to look inward and explicitly reflect on what they care about in doing research and what they are likely to gain or lose if they suppress or alter their care for any appreciable time. Careful and frank appraisal of these issues can help researchers make mindful choices about what to invest their care in researching and what trade-offs, if any, they are willing to make for instrumental gains. It can provide a realistic assessment of how well researchers' interests align with those of the OS community. Close alignment is likely to reaffirm individuals' research choices and call for only minor adjustments in researching, if any. Many of OS's productive (i.e., published) researchers are likely to fit this situation. Greater divergence between researcher interests and community interests would be more difficult to address, however. Some researchers might decide to make significant changes in their researching to align better with OS's justification logic, with the anticipation of gaining reputational benefits. Other researchers might choose to "stay the course" and continue doing what they care about in researching organizations, gaining intrinsic satisfactions while potentially foregoing instrumental outcomes. Still others might decide to

withdraw from the OS research tournament and emphasize other aspects of academic life, such as teaching and service, or leave academe altogether.

Making purposeful decisions about the right balance between researcher care and OS community care can be challenging. Because larger institutional forces legitimize the devolution process and give meaning to it in the OS community, researchers are likely to experience it as a normal or routine part of their professional lives and pay little if any direct attention to it and its consequences. Researchers simply may "go with the flow" rather than consciously analyze and possibly change their position in it, as Ziman (1996: 751) analogized: "Scientists know [their discipline] as fish know water. They understand instinctively how to live in it without being aware that they are doing it." To increase awareness of researcher care decisions, organizational researchers might take advantage of natural career milestones to address researcher care explicitly. These events could periodically alert researchers that it is time to expend special attention and effort on researcher care assessment to inform specific career decisions, such as what dissertation topic to study, where to apply for an initial faculty position, what research is a good path to tenure and subsequent full professorship, and how best to spend the twilight of a career. Similar attention to researcher care choices could occur at times when researchers are considering committing substantial resources, effort, and time to particular research projects. The key point is for individual researchers to appreciate that researcher care decisions can have profound personal and career consequences, and, therefore, it is better to address them explicitly at appropriate times rather than incidentally or by default after the fact.

CONCLUSION

We can take great pride in OS's enormous progress and development. The rapid growth in the number of OS researchers, journals, and conferences is commendable, as is the global reach of the field's research. Yet all of this probably says more about the strength of the OS community than it does about its members. Perhaps we should pay more attention to individual researchers and to what they are concerned and passionate about in researching organizations.

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Gavin M. Schwarz (PhD, University of Queensland) is an associate professor in the School of Management, UNSW Australia Business School. His current research interests include organizational change and inertia, and how organizations deal with failure. He is also interested in exploring how knowledge develops in organizational and change theory.

Chailin Cummings (PhD, University of Southern California) is an associate professor in the College of Business Administration, California State University-Long Beach. Her current research interests include interorganizational collaborative strategies, strategic alliance ambidexterity, and rhetorical analysis of management knowledge.

Thomas G. Cummings (PhD, University of California-Los Angeles) is a professor and department chair, Department of Management and Organization, Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California. His research interests include strategic change, designing high-performance organizations, and evolution of organizational knowledge.

AUTHOR QUERIES

AUTHOR PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUERIES

There are no queries in this article.
