

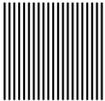


speaking out

Will You Still Need Me ... When I'm 64?¹ The Future of CMS

Ann L. Cunliffe

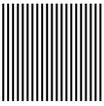
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I became involved with CMS in 1998 at the first CMS Academy Workshop in San Diego, and through the First International Critical Management Studies Conference in Manchester in 1999. Living in the US, I was finding it difficult to survive in a normalized academic world where my work didn't fit the norm. The crowning moment was when, as an adjunct, I was told I wouldn't get a tenure-track position because I wasn't doing the 'right' work, with the 'right' people, publishing in the 'right' journals and, in addition, my work was 'too innovative'. I thought the latter was a joke—it wasn't. During that time, it was the CMS community, along with a small group of women ethnographers, who frankly kept me sane, intellectually alive and engaged in the work I really wanted to do. Fortunately, the last four years have been in more supportive institutions, but this earlier experience leads to my particular interest in ensuring the CMS community is alive and kicking to celebrate its 64th birthday. How might we get there?

What Makes the CMS Community Different?

One of the main issues in our longevity is to be clear about what gives us our identity and differentiates us as a community of scholars. Contrary to many other Academy Divisions, we are a diverse group. We work from a range of disciplines (including strategy, accounting, organization theory, etc); are interested in a range of topics (such as power, identity, gender, epistemology, etc.); work from a variety of perspectives (marxist, poststructuralist, social constructionist, etc.) and embrace a variety of research methods. Ironically, this diversity can be both a strength and a weakness—it can keep us vibrant and engaged in many fields, yet lead to our demise if we aren't clear about who we are and what we contribute.



The Future of CMS

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I believe the central thread is our interest in the *critique* of contemporary forms of knowledge, social and institutional processes, and in generating *radical alternatives*.² Our contribution is to offer different ways of thinking about taken-for-granted practices, structures, and processes.

This leads to a second issue of identity and difference, and that is how others perceive the CMS community. In my experience, this seems to vary from ‘the group who criticize everything and don’t do serious work’, to ‘the elitist group who exclude others’. That’s quite a range. How good are we at communicating our intellectual and practical interests, and do we have some agreement about what connects us to, and differentiates us from, the mainstream?

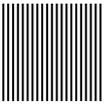
A third issue relates to the question of whether we engage in critique from the inside or outside. This issue played out in the debate around whether to pursue Division status in the Academy, a status that brings both legitimacy and financial support. The argument centred around the question of whether we would be selling our soul to the devil if we became part of the established Academy order—in other words, fears about being assimilated, which in turn might affect our ability to be critical.

One of our aims is to promote ‘critical scholarship as an essential component of the life of the Academy’,³ and in order to achieve this we do need to engage with the Academy and communicate our identity, interests and differences to others, so that we are seen as serious scholars engaging in rigorous and thoughtful work on relevant issues. I believe this means engaging in *critical debate* on mainstream issues, and it’s here that our diverse and interdisciplinary membership is a strength.

When I’m 64....

So if CMS aims to be alive and kicking in 64 years, what are some of the issues we need to address?

It’s important to be more sensitive to issues of inclusion: intellectually, culturally and geographically. We have gotten better at moving beyond the image of CMS as male and Eurocentric, but not far enough. I have to admit, while situating myself intellectually as a critical scholar, I am uncomfortable with some representations of CMS as politically left wing and critical of the shortcomings of others. This can lead to a narrow view of critically-oriented work that might exclude scholars who don’t see themselves as political activists. It might also explain resistance by managers and academics engaged in more mainstream work. Who likes being told they have shortcomings—and what privileges our position over others? Perhaps we need to turn the critical and reflexive eye on ourselves. For example, how do we reconcile challenging managerial authority and the profit motive if we take our academic authority in the classroom for granted, and our existence often depends on enrolling MBA students funded by those profits? Longevity requires openness to others, a degree of humility, and credibility. In a similar vein, I was struck when reading



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through the CMS Domain Statement a few days ago, by its westernized cultural assumptions. Mea culpa! Not only do we need to be more proactive about internationalizing and encouraging the involvement of scholars particularly from Latin America and Asia, but also in thinking about what *being critical* means in different cultures.

I want to end by going back to my initial story, because I know it's one that's shared by many other critical scholars who feel marginalized from their home discipline, home institution and even the academy at large. It can be a frustrating, lonely and isolating experience. Many doctoral students I've met over the last ten years come to CMS because they are struggling with choices about the type of work they *want to do* versus they feel they *have to do*, with choices about their identity as a scholar and about their career. They want to do work that fascinates them and is different to the norm, but are concerned that they'll never get tenure. We need to be much better at mentoring doctoral students and junior faculty, particularly outside Europe where only a few isolated 'critical' communities exist and where many find themselves the lone critical scholar in their institution. Let's build on the annual and bi-annual CMS meetings by offering ongoing support and mentoring throughout the year. It makes a difference when you have someone to talk to about how to do 'good' critical research, how to orient and write critical work, and how to get it published.

Notes

- 1 With acknowledgement to Lennon and McCartney.
- 2 CMS Academy Domain Statement (<http://group.aomonline.org/cms/About/Domain.htm> Accessed 10 December 2007).
- 3 CMS Academy Domain Statement.

Ann L. Cunliffe's research interests lie in exploring how organizational members shape identities in everyday interaction, and in examining the relationship between relationally-responsive interaction and reflexive approaches to research, learning and managing organizations. Recent publications include a book on *Organization Theory*; collaborating with Mary Jo Hatch on the second edition of *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives*; and articles in the *Journal of Management Studies*, *Organization Studies*, *Human Relations* and *Management Learning*. In 2002 she was awarded the Breaking the Frame Award from the *Journal of Management Inquiry*, for the article 'that best exemplifies a challenge to existing thought'. She is currently Associate Editor for *Management Learning* and the *International Journal of Qualitative Research in Work and Organizations*. **Address:** Business School, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX, UK. [email: A.Cunliffe@hull.ac.uk]