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Abstract

In this article we suggest that management research constitutes a field of practice that is made practically intelligible through embodied enactment. This relies on imagination, constructing a credible image of a typical community member. Undergraduate students constitute a significant audience towards whom these self-presentational performances are directed. Our analysis is based on findings from four UK Business Schools where students participated in a free drawing and focus group exercise and were asked to visualise a management researcher. Through identification of three dominant animal metaphors of management research practice, we explore the symbolic relations whereby a prevailing image of the management researcher as untouchable, solitary, aggressive, competitive and careerist is socially constructed. We argue that this competitive, self-interested impression of research is detrimental to ethical, critically reflexive, reciprocal and participatory modes of research, and to the development of management research as a broadly inclusive system of social learning.

Keywords

Research practice, knowledge production, symbolism, metaphor, visual analysis, undergraduate students

Introduction

In this article we analyse the symbolic relations between undergraduate students and management researchers by exploring researchers' self presentational activities in teaching situations involving face-to-face interaction. While considerable attention has been devoted to analysing the values, behaviours and perceptions of postgraduate management students, in particular MBA students (Mintzberg, 2004; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002), less is known about undergraduate student impressions of management research practice and the process of producing management knowledge (Mutch, 1997). These impressions are important because they enable understanding of management research as a sociomaterial practice (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Shatzki, 2005), an orientation and an identity that is embodied and enacted based on value judgements and beliefs about what constitutes proper behaviour and what matters. Therefore, we are not primarily concerned here with the methods, techniques and tools that management researchers use, or with the empirical and conceptual focus of studies, except in so far as these are used to construct an identity and an attitude that is consistent with the practice. Instead our analysis is guided by the idea that 'knowledge of technique needs to be complemented by an appreciation of the nature of research as a distinctively human process through which researchers *make* knowledge' (Morgan, 1983: 7, emphasis in original).

Relations between management students and researchers rely on a high degree of face-work (Goffman, 1971, 1972), comprising the habitual and standardized actions an individual routinely takes to ensure that the image they project and others might have of them is consistent with their role. In order to maintain face, researchers must present a line consistent with their role that is supported by the judgments of other participants, including other researchers, practitioners and students. The shaping of symbolic relations between

undergraduate students and management researchers is thus a process comprising researchers' attempts to stage a convincing performance and the reactions of audiences to their performance. Such performances occur in the context of field of practice, where action is organized according to understandings of how things ought to be done, by performers who draw on their cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1990), in order to demonstrate an appropriate attitude. This conditions what projects, actions and emotions are acceptable in management research, and orients researchers towards stipulating particular forms of practice, and the ends that may be gained from this (Shatzki, 2005).

We begin by locating our study relative to understandings of learning as a situated, social system that is dependent upon imagination, in addition to engagement and alignment, as modes of belonging (Wenger, 2000). Next, we discuss the value of visual metaphors as a framing device through which we suggest it is possible to gain insight into the imaginary practices whereby management researchers are socially constructed. We then we set out the methods and research design that form the basis of our comparative case study analysis. Using visual and linguistic data, we analyse the three main metaphors that emerged from the study and through this we show how presentation of a 'successful' impression is associated with playing a part that is solitary, aggressive, competitive, and careerist. Finally, we reflect on the implications of these findings for the development of ethical, critically reflexive, reciprocal and practical modes of management research and suggest why this competitive, self-interested impression of research needs to be challenged.

Learning how to be a management researcher

The 'research as learning' approach suggests that learning and research are both 'areas in which the interaction or engagement between individuals, groups and organizations is

fundamental to the process' (Vince, 1995: 59). This invites exploration of the experiential and interpersonal aspects of management research and highlights the importance of social learning processes in acquiring the skills and practices, as well as the knowledge that is needed to become a competent management researcher (Cassell et al., 2009). However, rather than focus on interactions between management researchers and research participants, here we concentrate on relations between researchers and students. These relations are relevant because research practice is shaped by a variety of teaching-related tasks which are aimed at transferring knowledge to students who are prospective managers. Undergraduate students are thus entwined in the practice of management research through teaching and learning interactions. Therefore, by analysing how undergraduate students perceive the self-presentational practices of management researchers, we can gain insight into how management research is understood by audiences who engage with it as a sociomaterial practice.

Learning how to be a management researcher relies on belonging to a social learning system and knowing how to behave within it (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The concept of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) provides a complement to the notion of research disciplines as tribes (Becher, 1989) and draws attention to the social and enacted nature of learning as a four-part process involving doing (practice), belonging (community), experience (meaning) and becoming (identity). Communities of practice are the basic building blocks of a social learning system and the cultural containers of competencies that make up such a system. 'By participating in these communities, we define what constitutes competence in a given context' (Wenger, 2000: 229). This draws attention to the behaviour, practices and terminology used when pursuing an enterprise, or their *shared repertoire*. It also invites a

focus on how researchers make sense of what they do as a joint enterprise, based on *mutual engagement* or interactions with one another (Wenger, 1998, 2000).

Belonging to a scholarly community of practice is reliant on three things: first, *engagement*, such as talking to people at conferences and producing artefacts like written papers; second, *alignment*, feeling that your activities are in line with respected ways of doing things that are perceived as related to a collective enterprise or shared goal; and third, *imagination*, constructing an image of oneself, ones' community, and the world which enables development of a reflective orientation towards one's situation from which it is possible to explore possibilities (Bell and King, 2010; Day, 2011; Wenger, 2000). The focus of this study is on the last of these three modes of belonging. This draws attention to the social processes whereby researcher identities are formulated through relationships with other researchers (Jones, 1995) and research participants (Wray-Bliss, 2003). It also invites a focus on the embodied aspect of learning (Shilling, 2007; Wacquant, 2005) through which competence as a practitioner is acquired and demonstrated. The question that guides our inquiry is: 'how does a management researcher need to act in order to be perceived as competent?' The emphasis is on the self-presentational performances through which a credible front is demonstrated to audiences (Goffman, 1971, 1972).

Metaphors of management research

The methodological approach through which we seek to address this question relies on metaphorical analysis. Metaphors constitute a pervasive and routinely used aspect of everyday life that is used to structure patterns of thought, action and communication by bringing certain aspects of a phenomenon into focus and obscuring others (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 2003; Morgan, 1986, 1993). However, the meaning of metaphors is gathered

from production and activation in the historical and cultural communities where they are applied (Cornelissen and Kafouros, 2008). We must therefore explore the embedded assumptions upon which the use of certain metaphors in particular contexts is founded, rather than treat them as literal entities that possess an uncontested meaning and refer to something which is universally recognized (Cornelissen, 2002; Gauntlett, 2007). Metaphorical analysis enables understanding of the underlying methodological presuppositions that inform management research practice, including the unconscious assumptions, theoretical and conceptual differences that differentiate paradigmatic groups of researchers (Hatch and Yanow, 2008).

Our approach relies on the elicitation of visual metaphors via use of the free drawing method (Meyer, 1991; Stiles 1998, 2004). Such methods are potentially more creative than other means of data collection, enabling people to articulate imaginative knowledge and express powerful emotions and unconscious thoughts in relation to a phenomenon (Broussine and Vince, 1996; Bryans and Mavin, 2006; Kunter and Bell, 2006; Vince and Broussine, 1996). This may be because the cognitive process required in drawing pictures ‘leads to a more succinct presentation of the key elements of participants’ experiences’ (Kearney and Hyle, 2004: 376). Previous studies have involved asking participants to imagine their organization metaphorically to gain insight into experiences of organisational culture change (Oswick and Montgomery, 1999), to encourage doctoral students to reflect on the identity work involved in becoming a management researcher (Bryans and Mavin, 2006), and as a method of studying organizational identity formation by exploring the ‘personality’ or multiple ‘personalities’ of an organization (Stiles, 2011).

Our approach uses animal metaphors as a means of exploring how undergraduates see management research. Gummesson (2000) uses the metaphor of a bird to suggest that the management researcher pecks at a small aspect of practice and contributes voluminously to theory, in contrast to the management consultant who pecks at a small amount of theory and contributes voluminously to practice. Gummesson's vision inspired us to adopt the methodological technique of using animal metaphors as a systematic method of data collection to explore how undergraduate students see management researchers. Animal metaphors are rich in symbolism (Turner 1986, 1990) and constitute a primary and enduring means of understanding human experience. They provide a widely recognized and accessible means of thinking about complex social and ethical issues, having circulated in societies since the development of writing, through literary narratives such as Aesop's Fables (Patterson, 1991), and 'have gradually sunk into the undertow of conscious thought' (Thrift, 2004: 462). Animal metaphors have been shown to be insightful in consumer behaviour research (Woodside, 2008; Zaltman and Coulter, 1995) by enabling in-depth conversations to explore emotions and feelings about products, and in organizational research (Mintzberg et al., 1998) as a methodological and analytical tool for encouraging people to imagine organizations and their members. Animal metaphors also provide a means whereby employees express resistance to management (Bell, 2012; Broussine and Vince, 1996; Rodriguez and Collinson, 1995; Vince and Broussine, 1996).

Research design

Case studies were selected using the *Advanced Institute of Management Research* (AIM, 2006) categorisation of UK business school identities as comprising: the social science approach, the liberal arts agenda, the professional school and the knowledge economy school. These categories correspond to recent debates about the competing priorities of the business

school. The social science approach is related to Pfeffer and Fong's (2004) call for business schools to be less closely connected to narrow performance and shareholder value driven agendas as dictated by private corporations. The liberal arts agenda relates to Grey's (2004) conceptualization of the critical school, characterized by a focus on the ethical, political and philosophical basis of management. The professional school reflects calls for a return to managerial practice through creating knowledge based on case law rather than on abstract scientific technique (Bennis and O'Toole, 2006). The knowledge economy position responds to calls for more dispersed, interdisciplinary, or 'Mode 2' (Gibbons et al., 1994) knowledge production through interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary research based on close collaboration with practitioners (Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007). The AIM (2006) model thus provides a useful basis for exploring whether the presentational performances of management researchers differ according to the business school context within which these practices are located.

The professional school, 'Pathway', is in a new university oriented towards widening participation, community engagement, professional training and local enterprise activity. 'Hilltop', the social sciences school, places high priority on academic excellence and research activity; it is a management, rather than a business school and hence is likely to view knowledge as a public good, rather than as a private commodity in the marketplace (Ferlie et al., 2010). 'Crossway' is a knowledge economy school which emphasises business engagement and executive educational activities. The last case in our study, 'Clearview', pursues a liberal arts agenda drawing on knowledge from philosophy, the arts and humanities, in addition to the social science disciplines and promotes a critical approach to management studies. This cross-sectional sampling strategy ensured a diverse range of UK business schools were represented in the study.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The free drawing method

Our research participants were final year students enrolled full-time on BA degree programmes in business and management. Data collection was carried out between September 2010 and April 2011. Volunteers were recruited by email and lecturer announcements and students were offered a small incentive to participate in the study, in the form of a free textbook or gift token. Participants were divided into groups of between two and five and invited to respond to the question: ‘if a management researcher were an animal what kind of animal would they be?’ This question assumes that students are participants in the construction of management research practice (Shatzki, 2005) and recognizes them as organizational actors who are ‘legitimate authors of the definition of their situation’ (Kostera, 1997: 347). Each group was given 30 minutes for the task and asked to produce one picture between them as part of a collective sensemaking activity (Weick, 1979). Collective free drawing helped to moderate excessive personalisation of researcher characteristics and avoid an extreme relativist epistemology where ‘...something means ‘just what I choose it to’ mean’ (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 185). Metaphorical analysis thus offered a way of looking at things which was not merely descriptive or representational but enabled ‘creative referentiality’ (Gauntlett, 2007: 145).

In the briefing it was emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers. Students were encouraged to be imaginative, creative, humorous or critical in depicting fantastical, imaginary beasts and considering the animal’s behaviours, characteristics and habitat. They were also encouraged to express feelings as well as thoughts. As we are both educators and

researchers in business schools, and the research was conducted in universities where participants were registered as students, students may have felt constrained in what they felt able to legitimately say in our presence. The use of images helps to mediate this, providing a 'symbolic cloak' (Rodriguez and Collinson, 1995: 754) through which students can commentate on management researchers' self-presentational practices more critically and emotionally than they could using language.

All students were in their final year of study and the majority were doing a dissertation research project as we expected this group to be most likely to express an informed interest in management research. The focus groups immediately followed the drawing exercise and lasted between 45-60 minutes. All were recorded and transcribed, and the data was anonymised. Students were encouraged to explain their picture and asked a series of questions including: how the animal interacts with its environment; whether the animal lives in groups, pairs or alone; whether the animal is peaceful or aggressive; if it attacks other animals of the same or of different species; if the animal is trustworthy or devious; how the animal obtains resources needed for its survival; and what the animal's relationship is to the external world. Follow-up questions were also asked to encourage reflection on the ethics of management research and the power relations entailed in its practice. Students were thereby invited to draw their experience to construct an image of management research practice as a relational totality in which practitioners interact with one another and with students. The drawings thus became metaphors for first-order analysis that could be explored both by participants and researchers (Heracleous and Jacobs, 2008a).

Analytic process

The final dataset comprised thirteen drawings and nine focus group discussions. Although initially only one spokesperson from each group was encouraged to explain the drawing and the meanings contained in the picture, all participants were later invited to speak, inviting collective ‘ownership of the interpretation’ (Heracleous and Jacobs, 2008a: 314). It was only at this point, with the ‘additional interpretation of the drawing by the participant’ that the image was ‘considered complete’ (Kearney and Hyle, 2004: 376). Students’ linguistic interpretations of their drawing thereby acted as a ‘double-check on the respondents’ intentions’ (Bryans and Mavin, 2006: 118), enabling images and words to be analysed together (Stiles, 1998).

Qualitative content analysis was used to identify recurrent themes in the data based on detailed analysis of images in conjunction with the focus group discussion transcripts (Rapley, 2011). By searching for variability as well as consistency in the dataset (Stiles, 2004), we were able to identify patterns and this formed the basis for coding. Through further development of our analytical categories we progressed from descriptive, verbatim signifiers related to animal attributes, towards more abstract second-order concepts that corresponded to the signified identity characteristics that participants sought to depict. Hence rather than looking for similarities between animals, we looked for recurrences of attribute meaning because we were more interested in the *kind* of animal (Zaltman, 2008) that was chosen rather than the category of animal per se. In our analysis we also looked for ‘relationship and interaction’ (Rapley, 2011) in our data. Through incremental, iterative analysis we generated three dominant animal metaphors of management research practice. We also remained tolerant of variability in the form of data that did not neatly conform to these overarching thematic categories. However, in this paper we concentrate on three dominant animal metaphors of management research practice that emerged from our study, as

a way of gaining insight into the mechanisms whereby certain researcher behaviours and characteristics are valorised and others dismissed.

It is a limitation of our method that imposing the category of animal metaphors in the data collection exercise constrained participants' ability to think of non-animal metaphors, and this has implications for the symbolic meaning created (Morgan, 1986). Students may also have been influenced in their choice of animal by their cultural background, and attributed different characteristics to the animal because of this (see for example Rodriguez and Collinson's (1995) discussion of the culturally specific nature of pig symbolism). Our choice of animal metaphors might therefore be seen as constraining participants' responses.

However, although the choice of animal metaphors was pre-structured, the use of pictorial methods to operationalize metaphor offers a useful way of exploring embodied practices and participants were 'able to ascribe local meaning to their constructions through drawing from and combining these pre-configured meanings into broader metaphors and storylines' (Heracleous and Jacobs, 2008b: 54), as part of a process of emergent, creative sensemaking.

Imagining management researchers

Great wild beast

The first animal metaphor, the 'great wild beast' (Figures 2 and 3), was the most consistent to emerge from our data analysis. The management researcher is portrayed as 'untouchable', 'king of the jungle', an animal characterised by its relative power, superiority and potential ferocity.

Cheetahs we think are quite competitive animals and blood-thirsty... [they] won't give up until they get an answer... until they've caught their dinner [*chuckling*]... It's... aggressive... Say one academic's trying to find out something and it finds out something, it wants the acknowledgement and the credit to go to themselves rather than another... they're just... trying to look after number one. [Pathway]

For students at Crossway, the 'great wild beast', defined as masculine, is also hardworking:

He doesn't really stop... He doesn't relax ever... He tends to just keep going pretty relentless...

Students also drew attention to the solitary, aloof nature of the beast, as illustrated by groups from Crossway and Clearview:

He doesn't live on his own in the sense that he's completely on his own... there are other creatures around that he can... feed his information to, but he works alone... he wouldn't like to share... the credit with anyone else... He does have a slight aggressive side that's brought out maybe by the other creatures in the jungle, but generally he'll keep that down. It's just occasionally he'll snap... He likes to be respected. He likes to be at the top... He likes the fact that people look up to him... He likes the fact he's the biggest animal in the jungle.

A giraffe is a lonely animal... it is rarely seen in the immediate company of others... some articles are written by two or three [but] usually [there is one person who leads]... for example the other two are giving [way to the other] who has his name

first... they are more likely to [penetrate] the research world because they are [linked with] a prominent scholar.

Sometimes they have... various authors, but most of the time [they are] solitary... there will usually be one person standing out, you write this person 'et al' and there is a reason why his name come[s] first...

A common theme related to the animal's potential for aggression, as illustrated by groups from Hilltop and Clearview.

[The] dragon's head is... vociferous... [it] goes on the attack and defends its ideas at all costs... it has to attack other people's ideas in order to be creating something new... if someone was attacking their work, so they would then attack back... I think it's protective of its self interests.

I reckon [the owl] could put out its claws and really... with the eyes, a big stare and just rip everything apart.

[The elephant comes] across as very peaceful and wise but when they need to survive they can... attack... If someone copies their work for instance... if someone copies their idea and says 'that's mine!' and he's done all the ground work.

Some students portrayed the beast as inhabiting a hostile landscape, as this group from Hilltop illustrates:

Student 1: There [are] vultures circling above it... There's always someone sort of looking over your shoulder being like critical of your work and... there's always the need to... keep moving on and renew your work otherwise it just becomes old... You know, there [are] people picking over your bones if your research isn't...

Student 2: Yeah, particularly in... highly theoretical work all it takes is a misplaced word or... a misconstrued word and... the vultures... start circling.

Management research is seen as a practice where only the fittest and strongest survive, according to the principles of social Darwinism (Nyquist et al., 1999).

Student 2: There's also the kind of nastiness of "This is my idea!"... When I did my research proposal I got told by my supervisor "Do not mention your idea to anybody else in the department," because my idea crossed over into the psychology department and he said "Do not mention it to anyone in the psychology department, and particularly this one person because he will steal your idea."

[FIGURE 2 AND 3 ABOUT HERE]

This highlights the power laden nature of the knowledge production process where management researchers must 'make a name for themselves' (Bourdieu, 1988: 2) through exclusive possession of 'external goods', including status, power and rewards (Holt, 2012), which they defend from attack by other researchers. Students also expressed critical views concerning the ethics of management research:

I think [they are] devious, but in a good way. To draw things out from you or from their research... There has to be some manipulative way of pulling... information out or drawing the best out of something or someone. [Hilltop]

These views were related to media representations of researchers in other disciplines.

They're so... self-involved with themselves and their research... They've got... a fakeness about them... You remember that whole global warming thing?... Was it the University of... [the] Midlands... One of them got caught with... email... where they were faking data for global warming and emailing each other and, er, going to... to change the data and stuff like that and there was a big uproar in the press about it and... the public thought that a lot of academics and scientists were... in it just to get grants... 'Fake' might be a bit of a strong word... [It's] the manipulation of... information they choose to show you... in such a way that makes it seem much worse than... it is.ⁱ

Yet students at Clearview viewed the management researcher as a gentler creature (Figure 4). They also saw the researcher as an aloof, distanced perspective, enabled by the long neck, from which the world of practice is viewed.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

The management researcher is usually in the tall trees. He works [up high] on theory rather than engaging... with the corporation... even when he's going to do research he

doesn't become part of the organisation. He... keeps a distance... he's rather defensive, the management researcher.

As this quote illustrates, the management researcher is often seen as occupying an objectively distanced position from which they can observe and theoretically represent phenomena of study based on the application of scientifically rational principles. Animals are portrayed wearing spectacles to denote their scholarly orientation and distanced engagement. They are thus spectators, withdrawn from managerial practice (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011). Yet some students, such as those at Crossway, were sceptical of the potential for positivist research to produce meaningful knowledge:

With most scientific [studies] there's a hypothesis and there'll be a result and one wrong or one contradicting result is enough to prove the hypothesis wrong, but with management research... it's not like that. It's not very concrete... there's still a question mark at the end... management is about language games and arguments rather than scientific facts... There's no right or wrong answer.

The management researcher is also depicted as an individual who dominates other researchers and shapes the direction of their research through force of will and personality or by exerting personal influence. Such images reinforce a view of management research as a hegemonically masculine activity where power and strength are rewarded. Overall, this metaphor sustains the myth of the management researcher as an omnipotent cultural hero.

Underground burrower

Our second dominant metaphor is of the management researcher as an ‘underground burrower’. It includes the mole with a bookworm tail (Figure 5) and the rabbit. Attention was drawn to the diligence, focus and persistence of the creature in pursuing relatively narrow goals, as students from Hilltop and Pathway explained:

A rabbit... [is] the type of person who would burrow down, like head first in books... like the rabbit in Winnie the Pooh... really organised, smart.

A mole... stays in his own specific area... [he] burrows into different parts of his area, but doesn't leave that specific area... He lives on his own, yeah, in his little worm hole... if another animal comes he just gets into this little worm hole and closes the top so that he can't see 'em... He's a bit slow as well. That's why we chose a mole – because he's slow... probably more methodical than slow.

[FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE]

The ‘underground burrower’ is also a solitary creature that tends toward modesty and quiet confidence. This metaphor is ambiguously gendered and is depicted as having intimate, local knowledge, understanding and being ‘organised...you can sort of imagine her surrounding herself with all these articles and journals and stuff and then just...organising all kinds of neat piles on the table and...working through it’ (Hilltop). The burrower was one of few animal drawings with ‘a little smile on his face because he likes what he does’ (Pathway). Such images reinforce a view of management research as a craft (Morgan, 1983; Prasad, 2005; Wright Mills, 1959), where passion, obsession, insularity, focus on one area, and diligence are valued and rewarded. The burrower conveys an impression of research as a

socially isolated, individualised endeavour. This confirms other representations of the nature of academic work and university life, which suggest competition for respect based on achievement, loneliness and anonymity are prominent features of everyday experience (Ogbonna and Harris, 2004; Sievers, 2007). Some students held an impression of management researchers as having a vocational attitude towards the conduct of research:

I think most people who are in academia it's a lifestyle choice... It might not be financially rewarding, but it could be rewarding in other ways in like the experiences that you go through, the people that you meet, the places that you see... there's a little bit more freedom than just going to your average 9 to 5 job... I think you have to... live and breathe what you're trying to find out. [Pathway]

Exotic creature

Our final animal metaphor is the exotic creature, characterised by its alien, ostentatious and glamorous nature. This is represented by the image of the peacock (Figure 6), drawn by students at Pathway.

[The] peacock... [is] quite a showy creature... full of its own importance really. Struts about... trying to make itself look quite clever [*laughter*]... but it doesn't really achieve much or do much really. It's not really very practical... Its feathers come out when he interacts with other people... He's got a monocle... It's quite formal... and traditional.

[FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE]

Whereas the burrower lives in the narrow confines of tunnels below ground, the ‘exotic creature’ has wings and lives in a remote environment, distant and divorced from mundane, everyday reality.

It lives in posh environments, normally in nice parks... It’s pampered basically... If you go to Disneyland, there [are] a lot of peacocks around there... They’re in a bit of a fantasy world [*laughter*].

Similar characteristics are associated with the spotted, winged leopard drawn by students at Crossway. There were also elements of exoticism in the owl, which students at Clearview said was an ‘elegant creature like the one in Harry Potter [children’s novels]’. The esoteric nature of the animal implies a lack of connection to the everyday world of practice.

Finally, all three dominant metaphors provide commentary on the perceived gap between management research and practice and the relationship between scholars who produce formal knowledge and practitioners who require applied knowledge (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011). The theory-practice gap is illustrated by depicting animals as inhabiting a bubble (Figure 7), hovering above the planet, viewing the ground from a great height due to the animal’s long neck, or sitting on the branch of a tree and looking down on reality. Knowledge was signified through the image of a river of books (Pathway), or by a sign pointing to the library (Crossway). Students at Crossway depicted the knowledge production process using the metaphor of a flock of sheep, one sheep being followed by others who represented peers and students, the whole flock being herded by dogs. Echoing Gummesson (2000), knowledge production is represented as a process involving inputs and outputs that are consumed and excreted (Figure 2 and 4).

[FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE]

Symbolism in management research practice

This analysis has focused on the symbolic impressions that undergraduate students hold in relation to management researchers. We have argued management research is a practice that is made practically intelligible through embodied enactment in teaching and learning contexts. The use of images as the primary research tool used to investigate this issue has enabled exploration of the symbolic (Turner, 1986, 1990) and the mythological (Kostera, 2008) elements of this type of identity work. Engaging with the symbolism and mythology that surrounds management research practice enables understanding of the value judgements and beliefs that practitioners hold about what constitutes legitimate practice. The use of visual methods facilitates expression of ideas, feelings and concerns that may be difficult or threatening to articulate using words alone, in a situation founded on unequal power relations, in terms of both pedagogical and research processes. This enables analysis of the beliefs and values associated with management research practice, and provides insight into how it is lived, not as a rational, technical enterprise, but as an embodied, socially enacted and emotional enterprise.

The symbolic impression undergraduate students hold in relation to management researchers is primarily based on the scholastic attitude and the epistemological framework of scientific rationality. This has implications for the ‘theory-practice gap’ because it prevents researchers from developing theories that capture the ‘logic of practice’ and means that ‘the meaningful relational totality in which practitioners are involved is neglected in favour of focusing on discrete entities with pre-given properties’ (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011: 342). Our analysis

also shows that management researchers convey an identity based on the personal possession of intellectual knowledge and the domination of other researchers and research participants. The impression that undergraduate students hold of management researchers is of a community engaged in instrumental, game-playing and primarily self-serving activities. Students view management researchers as somewhat egotistical, highly competitive with one another and fiercely possessive of the knowledge they generate. Successful knowledge production is seen as reliant upon a scholar's personal domination of a field of study as a means of preventing intellectual attack from rivals. They show awareness of the practices through which academic hierarchies of distinction are constructed and individuals defined either as successes or as failures (Bourdieu, 1988). Students also see management researchers as engaged in intermittent, instrumental and relatively distanced engagements with the empirical world, aimed at getting their data and 'getting out' (Buchanan et al., 1988) as quickly and efficiently as possible. This impression echoes concerns expressed about the prevalence of careerist instrumentalism in management research (Bell, 2011; Grey, 2010; Hambrick, 1994; Macdonald and Kam, 2007), and has little connection to the 'internal goods' associated with research practice, gained through 'methodological apprenticeship, a skilled engagement with phenomena under investigation and a theoretical advance' (Holt, 2012: 99).

The dominant metaphor of the 'great wild beast' also promotes a gendered ideal of the successful business school academic as a quantitatively productive, entrepreneurial, goal oriented subject (Fotaki, 2011; Ogbonna and Harris, 2004; Wilson and Nutley, 2003).

Students see management researchers as possessing 'a mythical character' and see research as an activity that is done 'elsewhere' by the 'ideal' academic, 'a mature, well-read sage who spends much time engaged in the doing of the academic – reading, writing, thinking, discussing' (Harding et al., 2010: 163). These stereotypes are reinforced by popular cultural

representations of researchers ‘manifest in films, fiction and all kinds of other cultural vehicles which together in part constitute received, idealized and normative images of what a ‘proper academic’ should be (and of course contains many contradictions and antagonisms within it: incisive intellects in tweed jackets; absent-minded scientists in white coats; unworldly dreamer; rational thinking machines; predatory lotharios; celibate monks etc. etc.)’ (Harding et al., 2010: 162). The management researcher is represented as a powerful, high-status, masculine hero, supported by a cadre of young, junior academics. The consequences of this symbolism are exclusionary and marginalising of those who do cannot or choose not to conform to it.

Current institutional-level discourses surrounding UK higher education place emphasis on ‘research-led teaching’ in the business school. Management researchers are therefore urged to find new ways of increasing the accessibility of their findings, and management students are encouraged to engage with research in a more informed and active manner (Reay et al., 2009). While much debate focuses on the role of the MBA in facilitating or preventing the effective translation of management research into practice (Mintzberg, 2004; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002), rarely has this been extended towards consideration of undergraduate students. At a time when higher education is becoming increasingly marketized (Slaughter and Leslie, 2001; Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004), these student impressions have the potential not only to affect teaching interactions and the expectations that students hold concerning these learning exchanges (Gabriel, 2009), but also researchers’ careers in a context where effective presentation of self is critical.

Conclusion

In this article we have focused on the shared meanings that surround the practice of management research. We have argued that being a management researcher is based on identity work which is founded on performances in situations of face-to-face interaction (Goffman, 1971, 1972). By focusing on the symbolic relations between management researchers and undergraduate students, we have analysed the practices of impression management involved in giving a convincing performance in this context. Our analysis provides insight into the process of becoming a competent management researcher and suggests that this involves tacit situational learning through which individuals acquire appropriate skills and knowledge. Management research must therefore be understood in the context of lived experience (Cassell et al., 2009) by understanding the value judgements, beliefs and behaviours of practitioners who enact this role.

The dominant animal metaphors that emerged from our study act as powerful organizational symbols that serve to frame reality (Kostera, 2008) by defining what constitutes a 'successful' management researcher and enabling alternative images to be rejected. This raises concerns about the ethics of management research practice, in particular the potentially exclusionary and marginalising consequences of these images, for those who cannot or choose not to conform to them. Disappointingly, this competitive, self-interested image prevails despite repeated calls for greater managerial collaboration (Tranfield and Starkey, 1998), involved action (Chia and Holt, 2008), reciprocity (Bell and Bryman, 2007), and practical rationality (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011) in management research. In conclusion therefore we suggest that a significant contribution to addressing the theory-practice gap can be made by involving a wider range of stakeholders in critical reflection on the beliefs and values that inform the practice of management research, and the purposes that these practices

serve. This analysis has provided an innovative illustration to show how such a conversation may be started.

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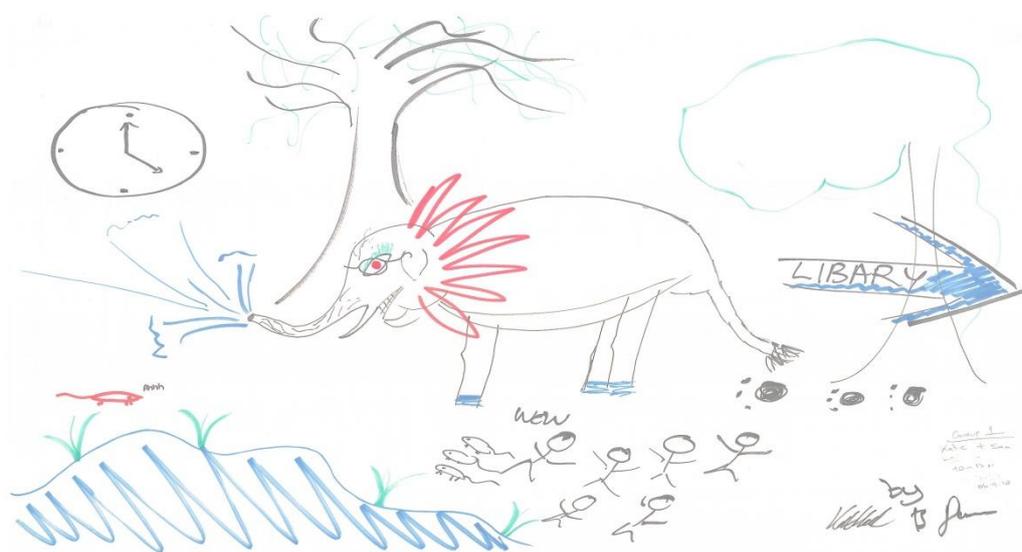
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Figure 1: Four UK business school cases

	Organizational Impact		
	‘Pathway’	‘Crossway’	

Teaching	Professional School (n = 9)	Knowledge Economy (n = 7)	Research
	'Clearview' Liberal Arts (n = 4) ¹	'Hilltop' Social Science (n = 10)	
	Scholarly Impact		

Figure 2: Elephant-lion (Crossway)



¹ Obtaining research access to a liberal arts school proved the most difficult. This contributed towards the under-recruitment of participants in this case, as by the time we were in a position to recruit, students were approaching the end of their final year of study and attending university less frequently.

Figure 3: Three-headed dragon-human-owl (Hilltop)



Figure 4: Giraffe (Clearview)

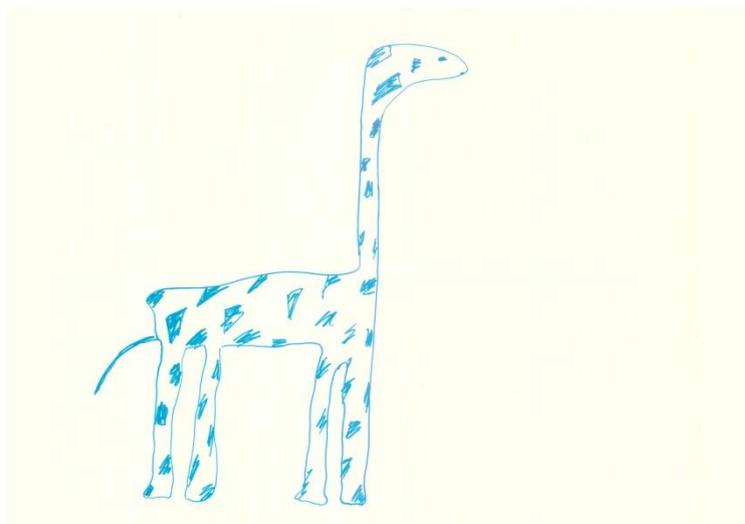


Figure 5: Worm-tailed mole (Pathway)



Figure 6: Peacock (Pathway)

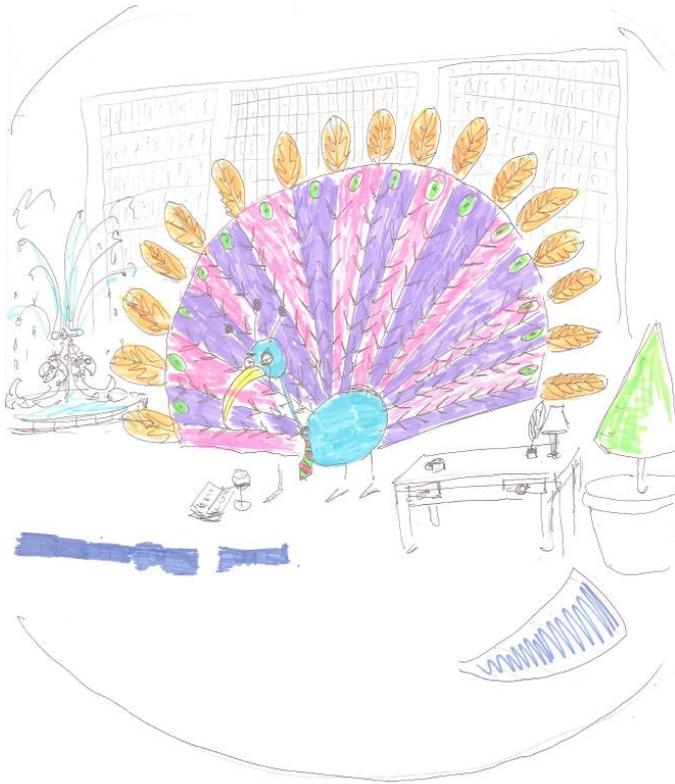


Figure 7: Fruit fly (Hilltop)



¹ This comment refers to a 2009 case involving researchers studying climate change at the University of East Anglia. The researchers' computer was hacked into and thousands of emails leaked onto the internet. Some of the emails were suggested to imply that the researchers had deliberately manipulated and suppressed data that was not supportive of their views in advance of an important international climate change summit. The researchers refuted these claims, saying they had been taken out of context.