

## MANAGEMENT TEXTBOOKS AS PROPAGANDA

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*Are management textbooks propaganda? Do textbook authors write to advance the interests of a particular group or groups (such as employees, organizations, and/or society)? Do they write to present the theory and research of the academic discipline? Do they write primarily to produce a product that consumers (faculty and students) will buy in sufficient numbers and at a price that will yield financial profit? This article explores these and related questions by asking four well-established management textbook authors—Kim Cameron, Duane Ireland, Bob Lussier, and Steve Robbins—to react to the metaphor of “management textbooks as propaganda or ideology.” Their responses*

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*provide insights into the role of textbook authors in shaping the direction of management education.*

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There are many published and widely varying views on the purposes, values, and ideologies that can, do, or should serve as the basis for faculty teaching. For example, Bowen (1980), acknowledging a bit of caricature, described six basic philosophies that in some combination underlie most organizational behavior (OB) teaching. First, there is OB as *liberal education*, which is the "academic" perspective of teaching the field's theory and research. Second, OB can be taught as a *bag of tricks*, in which skills and techniques are emphasized with little reference to theory, research, or internal consistency. Third, OB can focus on *personal growth*, emphasizing self-awareness, self-exploration, authentic communication, happiness, and satisfaction. A fourth approach is OB as *survival training*, with the objective of teaching students how to survive and prosper in a challenging and uncaring economic and corporate environment. Fifth, OB can be approached as *management finishing school*, attempting to both sharpen the students' managerial skills and give them sufficient knowledge to impress those they need to impress. Sixth, OB teaching can be approached as *rabble-rousing*, blaming many of the world's problems on the power elite and a self-maintaining hierarchical structure. An additional philosophy that has been emphasized more recently is that of OB as *stimulant to life-long learning*, in which teaching emphasizes the need for continued learning given the rapidly changing environment (e.g., Gregersen, Oddou, & Ritchie, 1993; Ramsey & Couch, 1994).

We have found, however, no published views on the purposes, values, and ideologies that can, do, or should serve as the basis for textbook writing. Because the majority of management courses in most business schools are taught using textbooks, we believe that some insight into the perspectives of text authors would be informative for faculty members, current and prospective textbook authors, publishers, and others interested in the shaping and direction of management education.

## Method

The goal of this study is to learn and present the views of established management textbook authors on the purposes, values, and ideologies that under-

lie their writing. To explore these questions, four authors—Kim Cameron, Duane Ireland, Bob Lussier, and Steve Robbins—responded to the same (multiple-part) question and then commented on each other's response. Although the opinions expressed are those of only four authors, all four are well established and collectively are quite influential in management education. Each has at least one management textbook currently in print in at least its fifth edition, and two have the largest selling texts in their markets. Combined, their approximately 25 textbooks are used in approximately 2,500 colleges and universities around the world, and cover the fields of management, OB, strategic management, management and interpersonal skills, human resource management, leadership, small business and entrepreneurship, and introduction to business. Collectively, they also have published approximately 25 academic books and more than 300 articles in leading academic and professional journals and have received a variety of awards recognizing their contributions to the academy.

This study is an outgrowth of a 2002 OB Teaching Conference panel session on "The Courage to Write."<sup>1</sup> As preparations for that session were under way, the *Journal of Management Education* Special Issue on "Metaphors of Management Education" was announced. One of the illustrative metaphors provided in the announcement was "management textbooks as propaganda." It seemed that the general and somewhat ambiguous nature of this metaphor would provide an effective stimulus for the panel authors to explore the general question of why they write, which was one of the major issues to be discussed during the panel session. (For a discussion of the use of metaphors in developing knowledge in organizational science, see Tsoukas, 1991.)

As a result, in the first step of the study, each author was asked to respond to the question, "Do you see your textbooks as propaganda or ideology?"

The authors were also provided definitions of *propaganda* and *ideology* to establish some common basis for their responses. Propaganda was defined as "material disseminated to convert from one belief, doctrine, or faith to another." Ideology was defined as "the body of ideas reflecting the social needs and aspirations of a particular individual, group, class, or culture." These constructs are developed in a more rigorous fashion in academic disciplines including political science, philosophy, communications, sociology, and psychology. In the current study, however, the constructs were used to stimulate expansive thinking by the authors about their purposes for writing texts rather than to engage them in a narrow discussion around the constructs.

In the second step of the study, each author received the responses provided by the other three and was asked, "What is your reaction to the statements of your fellow authors, especially as their statements stimulate your own thinking about 'management textbooks as propaganda'?"

## Results

All of the authors' responses to the multiple-part question asked at Step 1 are presented first (the order was established by random draw). This section is followed by the authors' reactions to the responses provided by each of the others (Step 2). The authors responded to these questions using quite different approaches in format, content, and style, and except for a minimal amount of very minor editing, their responses are presented as they were originally given.

### Step 1: Do You See Your Textbooks as Propaganda or Ideology?

Each author was asked to respond to the following multiple-part question:

Do you see your textbooks as propaganda or ideology? Do you write to tell a story you want to tell (e.g., to advance the interests of a particular group such as employees, organizations, and/or society) or do you write to do a better, more marketable job of telling what you see as the field's story? Has your perspective on this changed through your years of writing? If so, why and how significant is the change?

#### STEPHEN P. ROBBINS

*Textbook as propaganda or ideology?* I see my books as supporting an ideology. But, of course, all textbooks sell an ideology. OB books (which will be the primary focus of my discussion), for the most part, support a managerial perspective. This reflects the market—business schools. We need to genuflect to the Gods of productivity, efficiency, goals, etc. This strongly influences the dependent variables researchers choose and the ones that textbook authors use. So we reflect business school values. Other ideologies I “buy into” include: APPLIED vs. theory; MANAGING PEOPLE vs. personal growth; and COGNITIVE learning vs. experiential. Note that a number of OB authors (including others participating in the current research project) have done very well pursuing different approaches.

*Key stakeholders.* I'd say my books are 75% created by others, 20% a response to the market, and 5% involved in shaping the field. This has changed. My first edition, which introduced the individual-group-organization building-block model, was novel at the time. So early on I think I helped shape the field. Today, the OB paradigm is fairly well established. The books look amazingly similar in structure.

By “created by others,” I mean researchers. I do not mean publishers or faculty focus groups. I’ll elaborate on this in a moment.

In terms of shaping the field, I think my role is very small. I like to use the analogy that textbook authors are like Tom Brokaw or Peter Jennings. We don’t make the news. We report it. Our influence is in choosing what issues to report on. Most of these issues are given to us. But we have some degrees of freedom.

Back to my 75-20-5 percentages. Some examples: We (textbook authors) couldn’t write on recent “hot topics” like emotion and trust (even though we may have wanted to back in the 1980s) until there was a research foundation. I personally don’t think we should be writing “off the top of our heads.” We have to base our presentations on data. So we are very much dependent on researchers presenting their findings in journals and at meetings for our database. Example of responding to the market: the recent focus on skills. Finally, how we shape the market. I was the first with many topics (conflict, organizational politics, two chapters on motivation, organization culture, trust). I also was first with material on office arrangements (which never gained momentum). My 10th edition of OB (c2003) breaks new ground with material on the GLOBE research studies, workplace spirituality, online leadership, silence as communication, and feng shui. Each of these topics has surfaced from recent research rather than my personal agenda in seeing these topics included.

*Whom do I write for?* I first write for me. Then I write for students. I have a very short attention span. So if material doesn’t interest me, I know it’s not going to interest students. When I finish a book, I want it to provide ME with a comprehensive picture of the field. I think I’m a much harsher critic than faculty or students.

And “interest” for students is important. I don’t assume students are in love with our subject matter. We’re biased. We’ve committed our careers to this field. But we shouldn’t believe that just because we’re enamored with OB as a field that students are. Textbook authors have a responsibility to inform, to provide a comprehensive and accurate view of the field, but they also have a responsibility to present the field in a way that is interesting to students. We have to compete against jobs, social life, and other courses for their attention.

I haven’t forgotten the role of faculty. They are the gatekeepers. I can’t reach students without first gaining the support of faculty. I try to reach them by writing a book that will make them look good and providing supplements that will make their job easier and more efficient. My philosophy is: Try my books for a semester. If students don’t tell you that they like the book, learn

more, and if your teaching evaluations don't improve, drop my book. I think my books will pass this test. But people who write predominantly to impress faculty and colleagues are soon to be "former textbook authors." This, of course, introduces the debate as to what makes a good textbook author—researcher or writer?

*How do I choose topics, research, and examples?* My approach, I am told, deviates considerably from most authors. Today's textbooks are, for the most part, highly managed and developed. They rely heavily on the publishers' tripod: focus groups, reviewers, and development editors. Of these three, I only use reviewers. I disdain focus groups and development editors. They are largely responsible for the lack of innovation in texts. They are excellent at looking in the rearview mirror. But they can't see much ahead. As long as publishers follow this model, I'll have a one edition advantage. It's MY job to talk to professors, read the literature, go to meetings, and keep on top of what is happening in our field. If you ask professors what should be in a book, you tend to get what's already there. My favorite comments are "add this, add that, and make the book 200 pages shorter!"

*Publishers couldn't care less about our discipline.* Publishers are in the business of selling books. They'll sell anything if they think people might want it. They don't care about integrity or quality. Moreover, they firmly believe that they create the books. They have little respect for authors. And, in some cases, they're right. When authors say to their editors, "Tell me what to write," they reinforce this image. When the development editors dictate topics, sequencing, word count, examples, etc., the author doesn't bring much to the table. In today's market, where development rules, publishers have little respect for the contribution of authors. This, incidentally, goes a long way toward explaining why there is so little innovation in books. Professors are conservative. They talk a lot about change but they don't make book decisions in that way. Publishers minimize risk by making changes at the margin. They think they have a "great new product" with an OB book that is just like everybody else's but has a terrific new box theme! Is this innovation?

*1973 vs. 2003.* Thirty years ago, the field of OB was trying to find itself. The paradigm was in flux. In addition, most textbooks were poorly done. This is no longer true. Our paradigm is mature and textbooks, for the most part, are quite good. This means that it is a lot tougher for a new book to make a splash. I was recently looking at the top-5 selling OB books in 2001. They were in 9th, 7th, 7th, 5th, and 6th editions, respectively. So the newest first

came out in 1989. It's increasingly hard for new books to break into the market. This is consistent with a mature paradigm.

#### R. DUANE IRELAND

My approach to the writing opportunity is founded on my belief that it is a privilege and honor to write a textbook about strategic management. I don't envision the development and subsequent detailing of a story about strategic management to be a task. Indeed, a relatively small number of people receive support from publishers to prepare a written analysis and treatment of an academic field about which they typically are quite passionate. Thus, for me, the "chance" to develop a written presentation of my understanding and interpretation of strategic management is a bit of a validation of the scholarly work I've completed over the years to first understand strategic management (in order to be able to interpret the field in meaningful ways for classroom students and business executives) and then to give back to the field (through research). Thus, for me, the writing process begins with the conviction that at least *some* people have *some* degree of interest in learning about my analysis of the theory of strategic management and my interpretation of that theory in ways that hopefully have the potential to meaningfully inform and improve managerial practice.

*The telling of a strategic management story.* I approach the writing of the first edition of a book and each revision with the perspective that my challenge and opportunity is to tell a story about strategic management that is a theoretically grounded and solid *integration* of strategic management research (as drawn from the academic literature) and strategic management practice (as drawn from the business literature—*Forbes*, *Fortune*, *Business Week*, and so forth). Moreover, I believe that the story I write must be told in a way that will generate enthusiasm on readers'/learners'/students' parts. Strategic management isn't a discipline with which most young university and college graduates will be directly involved in their early years of work. Because of this, the university and college student's initial interest in the subject matter commonly is low. I believe that a path to travel to highlight the excitement of strategic management (excitement that is made possible by both academic research and business practice) is to tell a truly integrated and comprehensive story about how organizations use the strategic management process with the intention of enhancing performance. Importantly, I try to explain to readers when writing the book that improving the organization's performance simultaneously makes it possible for individual stakeholders

(including employees) to move toward achievement of their own unique, yet valued goals.

Thus, my approach to writing a textbook is to attempt to tell a compelling and interesting story about strategic management. But, that story must be true (i.e., it must be valid) and it must have staying power (i.e., it must be reliable). The strategic management story's truth allows students to be confident that their understanding of strategic management is reasonably accurate while the story's staying power lets students know that their understanding of strategic management can serve them well for some time in the future. (The reason for the staying power is that the story students have studied is grounded in both theory and managerial practice). Expanding on these points a bit further, I can note that for me, the strategic management story's *validity* is a product of carefully integrating research results into my treatments of various subject matters. The *reliability* of the story I try to tell is a product of carefully drawing from the business press to describe for readers *exactly how* research is translated into effective managerial and strategic management practices and, in turn, how practice informs the nature and conduct of future research.

#### KIM S. CAMERON

The role of management scholars is to provide valid, reliable, and verified information about management and organizations. The role of fiction writers, nursery rhyme authors, and popular storytellers is to provide entertaining, engaging, and inspiring information that may or may not have a basis in fact. The boundaries between supportable management scholarship and unsupported storytelling have become fuzzy of late in the management literature. Many books purport to prescribe keys to success in management, but the basis for their prescriptions is no more than personal experience, anecdotal portrayals, or common sense axioms couched in interesting illustrations. Evidence suggests that the public buys these books in mass, and many appear on students' desks in college classrooms. Unfortunately, they provide no more enlightenment than Aesop's fables or Dr. Seuss's stories regarding the reasons for management success, when certain prescriptions work and when they don't, or to whom the truisms are most applicable. Readers are entertained, and often inspired, by the litany of memoirs, tales, and adages that appear in these management books, but the main contributions of management scholarship—namely, identifying the what, why, and how of management and organization success—are too seldom incorporated.

My perspective regarding the obligation of management scholars who become textbook writers is unequivocal. They should take seriously their roles as scientists and scholars when disseminating knowledge upon which



students will base their own knowledge and judgments of the field, not to mention their practice when they find themselves in managerial roles. Authors of management textbooks have an obligation to make valid and reliable information accessible to students. That said, I do make a distinction between content and style, or between substance and pedagogy, in textbook writing. Texts need not be written like an *AMJ* or *ASQ* article in order to have scholarly legitimacy. Couching valid and reliable knowledge in case studies, exercises, or parables is perfectly acceptable so long as the scholarly basis for the prescriptions or the management principles being espoused is clear. The same standards of validity and reliability should characterize management textbooks as characterize academic articles, although the writing will no doubt be infinitely more engaging and enjoyable in most books. Texts may be entertaining, in other words, and may contain stories, anecdotes, and propaganda, but the knowledge base upon which these stylistic features are based must be scholarly research.

My point of view also does not imply that management texts should avoid introducing topics about which little scientific research has been done. Recently, for example, a number of scholars have begun doing research in the area of “positive organizational scholarship”—the study of virtues, positive or life-giving attributes of organizations, and extraordinary performance (e.g., Cameron & Caza, 2002; Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). To date, few empirical findings have been produced, but already two or three management texts have begun to include chapters on these topics (e.g., Luthans, 2002). As verified knowledge becomes available, it should be included in these updated chapters, and meanwhile they should not stretch beyond what is known in their prescriptive claims.

My own approach to management textbook writing may be illustrated in a book written with my colleague, David Whetten (Whetten & Cameron, 2002). In this book on management skills, we tried to remain true to what is scientifically validated in terms of *what* skills are important for managerial success, *how* management skills can be most effectively developed behaviorally, and *why* competent skill performance produces desirable outcomes. We introduced a learning model in that book based on the research on learning theory and behavioral change, and we tried to include only content in each chapter that had a scientific foundation. One paragraph in the introduction captures my philosophy about the role of management scholars as textbook writers:

Our intention in this book is neither to duplicate the popular appeal of the best-selling books nor to utilize the common formula of recounting anecdotal incidents or successful organizations and well-known managers. We have

produced a book that remains true to, and is based on, social science and business research. We want to share with you what is known and what is not known about how to develop management skills and how to foster productive, healthy, satisfying, and growth-producing relationships with others in your work setting. (Whetten & Cameron, 2002, p. 3)

Making management textbooks propaganda publications, therefore, is a legitimate activity if the content of the propaganda (i.e., the information being espoused) is based on scholarly research from the management sciences. Persuading students to believe in the truth—no matter how propaganda-like—is still a virtue.

#### ROBERT N. LUSSIER

*Do you see your textbooks as propaganda or ideology, and why do you write textbooks?* My human relations/OB, management, and leadership textbooks are ideology. In his book *Power Tools*, John Nirenberg asks: “Why are so many well-intended students learning so much and yet able to apply so little in their personal and professional lives?” I write my textbooks for professors and their students who want to go beyond learning about management to learning how to be managers. Reviewers consistently state that my books are the most “how to manage” traditional textbooks on the market with more variety and high quality application and skill development exercises.

*Have your perspectives changed through your years of writing?* Back in the 1980s, traditional textbooks did not include skills exercises. My first textbook was written back in 1988 with a skill building focus, prior to AACSB [American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business] calling for skill development. What I’ve done is to combine a management skills book, which includes limited skills coverage, with the traditional text to include all the concepts covered in the human relations/OB, management, and leadership courses. Thus, unlike other textbooks that now include skills exercises, many of which do not develop a skill that can be used directly on the job, I’ve included skills that can be used in one’s personal and professional lives from day one. Thus, there has been no change in my skills focus over the years.

However, outcomes assessment has influenced my development of the three-pronged approach to clearly distinguish management concepts/theories, their application, and skill development both in the text and test bank. My test banks include questions to assess application and skill development.

*Why don’t OB text authors innovate? And why don’t professors buy text approaches that are different?* Some authors do innovate. My books include

innovative ways to develop student ability to apply the management concepts and develop skills. I'm the originator of applying the concepts/application situations, work applications, objective case questions, cumulative case questions, video exercises, behavior models, behavior model videos with exercises and many skills exercises all within the three pronged approach.

Many professors don't adopt text approaches that are different due to common resistance to change and especially what Schein calls learning anxiety. As related to my books, to cut back on lecturing and including application and skill development produces anxiety for some. Also, some professors are reluctant to use books that are not written by the big name mainstream authors, and they are not the ones coming up with the new different approaches.

## **Step 2: What Is Your Reaction to the Statements of Your Fellow Authors?**

The authors' responses collected at Step 1 were sent (as presented above) back to the four authors who were asked, "What is your reaction to the statements of your fellow authors, especially as their statements stimulate your own thinking about 'management textbooks as propaganda'?" Their responses are provided below (in the same order established by the earlier random drawing).

### **STEPHEN P. ROBBINS**

I am struck by the similarities I see between Duane's and my spin on writing textbooks. We both see our jobs as storytellers; have a common desire to stimulate student interest in our fields; and are dependent on research so that our story "be true."

His task, I would argue, is quite a bit tougher than, say, an author of an OB text because "strategic management isn't a discipline with which most graduates will be directly involved in their early years of work." His success in this market is an acknowledgement that he's found the means to translate research into an integrated framework that works for faculty and students.

In a similar vein, I agree wholeheartedly with Kim. In fact, I recently wrote a professional book (Robbins, 2002) in which I attempt to directly respond to the "unsupported storytelling" books that have become so popular lately. There is one phrase that Kim used that I want to comment on. He says, "Texts may be entertaining." Why are we afraid to say that our textbooks MUST be entertaining? The challenge for textbook authors, as I see it, is to provide valid, reliable, and verifiable information in a format that IS enter-

taining to students. These are not incompatible objectives. Faculty tell me all the time that a large proportion of students don't read their textbooks. Maybe we have to take some of the blame for this. Are we not contributing to the problem when our books fail to entertain as well as educate? I, for one, explicitly try to make my books entertaining to readers. And I don't believe this has to lessen, in any way, the overall rigor of the presentation.

Bob has been a leader in the skills movement and, as such, is on top of where the market seems to be going. We are all now adding skill elements to our books. But I want to provide some history here. Back in the mid-1970s, when experiential management and OB books were becoming all the rage, it looked like they were going to overtake cognitive texts as market leaders. Interestingly, it didn't happen. Faculty talk a lot about the importance of applications and skill development, but they have continued to adopt more traditional cognitive texts that treat skills in a section at the end of a chapter or the book. Texts like Bob's and Whetten and Cameron's managerial skills book provide valuable options to faculty. Yet every time I look at market-share reports for textbooks in management and OB, I keep seeing the same names—Daft, Griffin, Kreitner, Robbins, Schermerhorn—and these are not what we'd call skill-building books. I think the pure skills ideology will continue to dominate only a small segment of the management and OB markets. Its influence will be at the margin—as an “add-on” feature to cognitive texts.

One final comment regarding innovation. Bob points out that big name mainstream authors are not the ones likely to come up with new approaches. He's absolutely right. And major publishers, who are inherently risk-averse, aren't enthusiastic about investing in innovative products without a big name attached. The bad news is that the problem is likely to get worse. There are now just five major college textbook publishers. When I began writing in the early 1970s, there were more than 20. Fewer publishers means fewer outlets for all textbooks and less opportunities for innovative products.

#### R. DUANE IRELAND

I find my colleagues' clearly articulated views of their textbooks *interesting* and *reinforcing*. I'll provide a few comments to describe each reaction.

In terms of *interest*, it is obvious that Steve, Kim, and Bob devote a great deal of thought to the writing of their books. It should be comforting and encouraging to those using their texts to know that what they are reading and studying are products of serious, dedicated, and professional efforts. I think that my colleagues' feedback regarding the question of textbooks as propaganda or ideology demonstrates that the framework(s) to which they are committed definitely provide(s) the foundation for the development of their

books. Writing by adhering to a chosen framework (textbooks as propaganda and/or ideology) provides internal consistency to an author's work and signals to readers what they can expect to gain from studying the author's materials. Although I'm not surprised, I am gratified to understand that the success my colleagues have had with their textbooks is influenced by their commitment to provide audiences with carefully constructed treatments of important materials.

The *reinforcement* I derive from Steve, Kim, and Bob's comments is what I perceive to be essentially a validation of the "textbooks as propaganda" perspective. Kim's commentary provides the strongest support for this view ("Authors of management textbooks have an obligation to make valid and reliable information accessible to students") while Bob's approach to textbook writing is more closely aligned with the "textbook as ideology" position ("I write my textbooks for professors and their students who want to go beyond learning about management to learning how to be managers"). I believe that Steve's comments reflect a relatively equal commitment to the textbooks as ideology ("I see my books as supporting an ideology") and propaganda ("We don't make the news. We report it. . . . We have to base our presentations on data") perspectives. Reflecting on my colleagues' views is causing me to become more committed to the need to provide readers with valid and reliable treatments of materials that when understood and effectively used have the potential to positively affect organizations and the stakeholders they serve.

In responding to the first question, I offered my view that textbooks can be seen as stories that are told about organizations and their stakeholders. To me, properly and effectively constructed stories are grounded in the work of academic scholars. As Steve suggested, textbook authors "report the news." Similarly, Kim suggests that while texts can be entertaining, "the knowledge base upon which these stylistic features are based must be scholarly research." Another way of presenting Steve and Kim's positions here is to suggest that people writing textbooks should be committed to *explaining* rather than to *predicting*. Integrating the results of researchers' efforts from multiple disciplines allows us to *interpret* and *explain* organizations and individuals' actions in ways that facilitate understanding. In turn, gaining an understanding about relationships among different parts of organizational life is the well from which managers draw to develop their skills. My view is that as scholarly writers, we can't predict the skills managers will need to be successful in their future work. What we can do, though, is to explain what is known about effective managerial practices in ways that make it possible for our current readers/future managers to determine the skills they and their colleagues will require at different points in time to reach organizational and

personal goals. Thus, reading and seriously thinking about my colleagues' views has validated my belief in the importance of textbook writers' efforts to study, interpret, and present serious scholarship in ways that will enhance the practice of management through the future efforts of those reading what they've written.

#### KIM S. CAMERON

The contributions of Duane, Bob, and Steve are unquestionably outstanding, and their durability as text authors and senior role models in the field of management is well known. They each have crafted books that every serious student in management would find enlightening, and they continue to be active, interesting, and articulate writers. I am flattered to be included in a writing project with them.

In this brief commentary I want to return to the very intriguing central question posed regarding textbooks as propaganda. I'll try to make just one more point. Unfortunately, it will take a few paragraphs to do so.

I am reminded of a powerful and memorable article by Murray Davis entitled, "That's Interesting!" in which Davis made the case that information is remembered not because it is true but because it is interesting. That is, the credibility of ideas is based not so much on whether they are right or true as it is on whether they are interesting. For example, if I were to make the statement, "The paper you are reading right now is white," that is (probably) a true statement, but it will be quickly forgotten because it is not interesting. It does not challenge current assumptions, raise new thoughts, or create novelty. What's interesting captures attention because it is out of the ordinary and it challenges current viewpoints. If I said, instead, "The paper you are reading reminds me of the birth of my first child," for example, you might find that statement more interesting. It is generally understood that the first criterion people use to judge the information they encounter, before deciding whether it is true or false, is whether or not it is interesting.

One danger this poses, of course, is that we text authors may mistakenly assume that because our books are in the 5th, 7th, or 9th editions, we have captured the most accurate, valid, and useful information. We are telling people the truth. The accuracy of that assumption is questionable because, I suspect, one of the temptations of authors of textbooks is to try to become more interesting, more innovative, and more appealing to readers with each succeeding edition, often in the name of currency. There is a danger that our texts, in other words, may ever-so-gradually slide away from valid and reliable management science, or what we know to be true management and behavioral principles. Davis pointed out that because "a false idea can

awaken the mind; a true one can put it to sleep,” authors must be careful to maintain integrity in their textbook writing.

The term propaganda is usually interpreted to be (in Webster) the distribution of “ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one’s cause or to damage an opposing cause.” It is usually equated with indoctrination, false promises, designed to create a predetermined effect, and, especially, for self-serving purposes. When propaganda overtakes the dissemination of accurate, authentic, and verified organizational and management science in textbooks, I think it is time to worry. This does not mean, of course, that texts should not be interesting. Indeed they had better be interesting if they are to be published. But the idea of textbooks as propaganda just doesn’t seem to sit right with me.

Now what is my point, and why do I seem to be beating on this drum so repetitively? Up until 1980, no management book had ever reached the *New York Times* best seller list. Then along came “In Search of Excellence” (the validity of which has since been discredited, even by the authors themselves). Since that time, we have been barraged with one management book after another competing to become a best seller. Some of that competitiveness may have crept into the textbook market as well. I feel strongly that our role as text writers and as organizational scholars is to be true to our scholarship and to be watchful of the temptation to join the propaganda perpetuation game.

#### ROBERT N. LUSSIER

I write to blend ideologies, not to take one side or the other. My books include the theory but also use strong applications; they develop managing people skills and personal growth, and cognitive learning with experiential. I don’t write off the top of my head and find that using lots of research/references improves the quality of my work. What I do is to present the concepts/theory and take it to the next level by having the students apply the concepts and develop their skills in all the OB/Mgt/Leadership topic areas. Or I see myself as a blend of Robbins’ great traditional text and Cameron’s great skills.

Yes, to be a mainstream textbook, most of the issues are given to us. It is common for me to include topics because I know reviewers will say it does not have it. It is also difficult to drop topics, even older ones, because some reviewers want to keep them even though they ask for shorter books. This is when developmental editors play the key role in making the call. One of my frustrations with some, not all, developmental editors is that they will change things without even asking if it is OK. You don’t tend to find out until the book is close to going to press, so they say it cannot be changed. With a dis-

agreement between author and developmental editor taken to the senior editor, I've lost.

Faculty are the decision makers, and I truly am grateful for good reviewers who have improved my work. I began, and continue, to write for my own class use and hope that faculty will enjoy using my texts as I do. Maybe part of my success is the fact that I have not tried to impress faculty and that students find my books easy to read. My empirical research writing style is clearly different from my textbook writing.

Publishers certainly do ask authors to be different but not too different from competitors. When I've wanted to write a new textbook, I would look at the competition to make sure to cover all the same concepts. Recently, I wrote a book for my own classes with a very innovative approach. I wasn't even going to send it to a publisher because I figured it was too radical. However, I said "what the heck, I wrote it and the worst that can happen is to get rejected." I found an editor who is really interested in it and sent it out to review, and I have no name recognition in the course. It's the faculty who will make the decision. It took me about seven years to get an editor to publish my traditional principles of management text with a strong skill component; I was repeatedly told faculty don't want it, based on reviewers, or the market was too small. Today, the book is doing well, essentially in its third edition. So I'm hoping that faculty really are open to change, or I guess things may be getting better slowly.

## Conclusions and Implications

Although the primary purpose of this study is to present rather than critically analyze the views of four well-established textbook authors, it might help to provide observations regarding their responses. The commentaries and rebuttals that follow this article are intended to add to these initial observations.

Not surprisingly, the four authors saw and responded to a variety of different issues when stimulated by the somewhat ambiguous metaphor of "management textbooks as propaganda." Although their responses varied considerably in focus, approach, and style, all appear to provide very candid and reflective thoughts that are relevant to the shaping and direction of the management field.

First, all four authors write their textbooks to support a managerial ideology. Robbins "support[s] a managerial perspective . . . genuflect[ing] to the Gods of productivity, efficiency, goals, etc." Ireland hopes to "meaningfully inform and improve managerial practice"; Cameron to "disseminat[e]



knowledge upon which students will base . . . their practice when they find themselves in managerial roles” and to present “what skills are important for managerial success”; and Lussier writes “for professors and their students who want to . . . [learn] how to be managers.”

Second, all four authors stress that academic research provides the foundation for their textbooks. Robbins says, “We should [not] be writing ‘off the top of our heads.’ We have to base our presentations on data . . . [and] are very much dependent on researchers presenting their findings in journals and at meetings.” Ireland states, “Strategic management story’s validity is a product of carefully integrating research results into my treatments of various subject matters.” Similarly, Lussier “find[s] that using lots of research/references improves the quality” and Cameron states “The same standards of validity and reliability should characterize management textbooks as characterize academic articles.”

Third, all the authors are very well aware that their textbooks are in a marketplace and must be attractive to students and faculty if they are to survive. For example, Robbins talks of “present[ing] the field in a way that is interesting to students” and “writing a book that will make [faculty] look good and providing supplements that will make their job easier and more efficient.” Ireland “believe[s] that the story . . . must be told in a way that will generate enthusiasm on readers’/learners’/students’ parts.”

Fourth, and following from points two and three above, the authors appear to view themselves primarily as followers rather than leaders in shaping the development and direction of the *content* of the management field. This is most explicit in Robbins’ statement that his textbooks are “75% created by others [researchers], 20% a response to the market, and 5% involved in shaping the field.” Cameron contrasts the role of textbook writers with that of other types of writers, including those writing popular, “storytelling” management books.

Whereas the authors describe their role as limited in shaping the content of the management field, they appear to see a somewhat larger role for themselves in shaping the way the field is taught. For example, Cameron and Lussier both point to their skill-building focus, and Robbins describes the novelty of his individual-group-organizational building-block model when he first introduced it. However, both Lussier and Robbins describe the role of publishers and faculty members in limiting the amount of textbook innovation that is possible.

These conclusions have a number of implications for faculty members and other stakeholders interested in the shaping and direction of the management education field. First, teaching faculty members should recognize that a managerial ideology and academic research are the likely foundation for

established textbooks. Although this may be consistent with the values of most faculty members teaching in the curricula of business schools, it should perhaps be a conscious criterion in choosing a textbook (or choosing not to use a textbook).

Second, faculty members should not look for the established textbook authors to be very innovative in their approach to content or in providing a teaching method. Academic research constrains content innovation, and the market (students, faculty, publishers) constrains method innovation. Although there have been some exceptions (e.g., the managerial skills approach), the market for most management teaching areas is now quite mature, which reduces the likelihood of further major innovation. For example, in assessing various criticisms leveled against management/OB/human resources courses in recent years, Rynes and Trank (1999) identify "textbooks" as the first intermediate-term solution. Recognizing that "it would require almost complete restructuring," they "believe it would be a worthwhile experiment to see whether M [management]/OB and HR [human resources] texts organized around important business problems might produce more favorable reactions (and deeper understanding) among students." They also suggest designing "more content around the types of jobs (e.g., consultant or financial services) and organizations (investment banks, consulting firms, and high-technology startups) in which business students increasingly aspire to work." Although the responses of the authors in this study suggest that they are unlikely to make these types of changes, the Internet and related information technologies that are now widely available may allow more "innovative authors" to emerge and meet the needs of "innovative faculty."

Finally, for observers who are concerned about current problems or the direction of the management field (or subareas within that field), it appears that textbook authors are unlikely to lead in providing solutions. These authors espouse mostly conservative ideologies (i.e., seeing a close correspondence between the ways things are and the way things ought to be). This is not surprising given the level of success of the group and their rational self-interest in maintaining the status quo. In those few instances in which they express any discontent, it is with elements of the system that they perceive as in some way threatening or limiting their own success. To the extent that this conservative ideology drives the authors' textbook writing, then this would seem to serve the interests of other groups who are also currently most powerful in management education and its environment (researchers who publish in the best-regarded mainstream journals, dominant organizations, and stakeholders, etc.).

Additional analysis of our findings and conclusions may be worthwhile, and we anticipate that the critical commentaries and rebuttals that follow this article will add different perspectives and new insights.

## Note

1. Three of the four authors contributing to this article were also panelists. The fourth panelist chose not to participate in the current study and a fourth author was added.

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