

Editorial

A New Paradigm?

As has been stated many times, **ajer's** strength is the eclecticism in its articles. This encompasses not only the subject matter, but also the research methodologies. As an academic, peer-reviewed journal, like many other academic journals, **ajer** does not use slogans or similar techniques to attract readers. The attraction should be the content.

For many years, many corporations throughout the world have used slogans to attract attention to their products. Indeed, many universities seem to have adopted selected aspects of corporate practice as well as corporate designations and jargon terms. Rather than being institutions devoted to teaching and advancing knowledge, many universities have become almost factory-like in their view that research and teaching are commodities, with the former being more valuable than the latter, and that the only metric worth considering is that of quantity. Indeed, a mark of worth for the individual professor is often the quantity of "research" that one produces in a given time, usually an academic year. The greater the quantity, the better. Hand in hand with the commodification of research is the use of slogans such as *Research makes sense* and *Research is best*. Such slogans may seem reminiscent of political slogans of repressive regimes such as *Kraft durch Freude* (strength through joy). Selling commodities and using slogans are not the only manifestations of universities borrowing corporate attributes. Although most academic heads of universities continue to refer to themselves as presidents, some also append the abbreviation CEO (short for Chief Executive Officer), probably conveying to the world that the university is really not an institution of higher learning comprising a community of scholars, but a commercial enterprise with a business-like corporate structure: perhaps much like the Enron corporation in the United States, where the CEO and other alphabet soup-titled executives plundered the company's assets and employees' pensions in a manner that would have made medieval feudal lords envious. In other words, a corporate structure has an implicit dyad: administration and employees. The administration takes care of the "big ideas" and operational policy, while the employees keep busy with productivity. Ideally, this continually increases productivity. Parenthetically, how far can this process of increasing productivity go before exhaustion of faculty or saturation occur?

All too often those who find themselves in administration either forget their origins as ordinary academics or believe that they are in administration either because of their superior attributes or because of some divine or supernatural intervention. No doubt by this juncture, some of you are either skeptical of my claim or are thinking that I am engaging in hyperbole. Following the appearance of an earlier editorial, "Reductio ad absurdum" (Buck, 2003), I received communications both pro and con. One e-mail in particular was most critical of what was written. The writer informed me of the lofty position in central administration he or she occupied in another university and that my editorial was "completely useless." The e-mail went on to state that the reason for this

assessment was that those who are in administration know what is best for their “employees” and that all my editorial achieved was to get several employees (I am presuming that this meant professors) so excited that they started questioning policy. In the manner of a stern mother admonishing a child, I was told, “If you were an employee in my [sic] institution, your future as an academic would be in doubt if you continued being needlessly provocative.” Fortunately, I do not work in that institution, and although that person may indeed be important and powerful, the extent of that power does not extend beyond the precincts of that institution. Although one might consider that this form of authoritarianism is yet another manifestation of the corporate influence on higher education, it is actually a management style traceable to the beginnings of universities.

Rolando Bandinelli (ca. 1105-1181) besides being a priest, was a professor at the University of Bologna and sometime instructor in other centers of medieval European higher education. During his time as an instructor and through his travels, he observed what he considered inappropriate behavior by other scholars. To be sure, some of the inappropriate behavior consisted of clear transgressions such as teaching without a *licentia docendi* (Alexander III). Even in the 12th century a formal teaching credential was a requirement. However, enforcement was often inconsistent. Nor did Bandinelli like particular individuals who asked too many questions, especially when such questions seemed to challenge what was obviously “the truth.” Apart from effecting change in the institutions with which he was associated, he could do little to implement systemic change. This changed, however, in 1159 when he was elected Pope Alexander III. That Alexander had clear and well-defined views is apparent when one considers that when he was elected, some cardinals believed that the majority had made a grave mistake and set up an antipope against him. Indeed, Alexander had to contend with other antipopes at various times throughout his pontificate (Cheetham, 1992). Nevertheless, Alexander made it a personal priority to ensure that higher education was run properly. Teaching without a license or questioning matters that had been decided at a high ecclesiastical level often resulted in excommunication (Alexander III; Marrou, 1956).

Unfortunately, Alexander III and his agents seemed to have little patience for any deviation from or questioning of the curriculum or even how administration was constituted. The long-term effect was that universities in general changed relatively little, and it took tremendous evidence and effort to alter curriculum. It was not until the 17th century, for example, when William Harvey provided empirical evidence of the circulatory system that the entrenched notion of the “humours” in medicine was displaced. Finally, there was an alternative, although initially not universally accepted, to the work of Greco-Roman physician Marcus Galen (Bylebyl, 1979).

Although some curricular change occurred in universities, and such institutions proliferated, especially in the New World, they appeared to some to have maintained an uncritical inertia that resulted in their being little more than “vocational schools” that carried on, often to an inferior standard, what was begun in secondary education (Flexner, 1930). Indeed, Flexner (1866-1959), commenting on the rapid growth of United States and Canadian universities in

the early 20th century, stated, “A wild, uncontrolled, and uncritical expansion has taken place” (p. 222). His criticism extended to much of the professoriate, which he maintained often simply put forth ever-increasing numbers of publications with little regard to their critical worth. Intemperately Flexner referred to such individuals as “quacks [who] emit publications that travesty research” (p. 222). Rather than serve as finishing schools, or factories for ever-increasing quantities of dubious research, among other things Flexner advocated critical analysis of what was done at universities and that universities be primarily centers of higher learning. The influence of people such as Flexner, the belief in governments and in much of society that access to good postsecondary education was not merely a privilege of the wealthy few, and the development of policies around the idea of academic freedom resulted in a period where scholarship and critical thought were in the ascendant.

Now, with the reduction of public funding, a prevailing view appears to be that the only way public institutions can survive is to emulate private corporations: the *if you can't beat 'em, join 'em* philosophy. Ironically perhaps, this model seems to return us to a more hierarchic or top-down approach so familiar to Alexander III, where “employees” are expected to conform to narrow policy without question. The scene is reminiscent of the second verse of Reynold’s (1962) satirical song *Little Boxes*:

And the people in the houses
 All go to the university,
 And they all get put in boxes,
 Little boxes, all the same.
 And there’s doctors and there’s lawyers
 And business executives,
 And they’re all made out of ticky-tacky
 And they all look just the same.

G.H. Buck

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