
A response essay to TAMARA Manifesto

James R Barker. *Tamara : Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science*. Las Cruces: 2001. Vol. 1, Iss. 1; pg. 25, 3 pgs

Full Text (1774 words)

Copyright TamaraLand Publishers 2001

[Headnote]

In writing my response, I have chosen a somewhat different tack from the norm. I want to write what the articles moved me to write - not a scholarly criticism, but what the articles caused me to feel, to think, to believe, to express. Essentially, I want to genuinely respond. My response takes the form of what I believe "we" should do in response to David Boje's Tamara Manifesto and to the other articles as they stand as examples of what critical postmodern organization science can do. This I Believe.

I believe in the usefulness of language, of discourse. What is unique, exciting, fun, volatile, and dangerous about us humans is our ability to use language to the complex, and creative extent we do. Language enables us to do what we do as social humans - for good and for bad. We get ourselves into and out of trouble with our ability to create discourse. We bring ourselves together through discourse and set ourselves apart. You get the idea. In the manifesto, David wrote, "Tamara defines dialogs among wandering audiences who chase fragmenting storylines from room to room in the mansion of science, a place increasingly constructed and furnished by corporate power." Because I believe in the usefulness of discourse, I want to call our attention to those dialogs. The crux of a critical postmodern organization science is those dialogs for they entail our potential and our consequences, our past, present, and future. Those fragmenting storylines are "our" life. Okay, what to do about that? Our task, then, as critical post-modern organization scientists is to create dialogs - mostly as David eloquently described, dialogs of opposition, conscious raising dialogs if you will. Critical postmodern organization scientists is to make "us" humans aware of what we are doing to ourselves.

For example, note how David, in the Manifesto, calls our attention to the emerging issue of net slavery; note how Steve Fuller calls us to question what will become of knowledge; note how Helen De Cieri and her colleagues provoke us to see the subtle consequences of current international HR practice. Yes, we critical postmodern organization scientists are opening people's eyes, we are sparking creative dialogs, but what do we do for an encore? If our writing opens the gates, then, as David puts it in the Manifesto, "what do we write about once the gates are open?" How do we move our discourse to a different level? How do we make a real difference? How do we create change? Being "Invitational." If we critical postmodern organization scientists ever move away from the margins, we need to attend to ways of transcending the natural void between those in power and those critiquing that power.

As a mean to this end, I argue that the "what do we write about once the gates are open" is to be invitational. I use the term "invitational" as a discursive "attitude" (inspired by Foss', 1993, perspective on "invitational rhetoric") meaning that in our writing we not only seek to raise consciousness, but we also seek to share understanding with those who disagree with us. We actively onenlv trv to find a way to move past apparently irreconcilable differences to a new

creative level of understanding - in a sense, inviting an inventive solution the problems that divide us by creating a shared discourse of mutual awareness.

That said, what to do as the gates open?Provoke and invite response. Initially, as "invitational" critical postmodern organizational scientists, we should continue to do what we have been doing well: raising consciousness. We are generally quite good at expanding the range of argument on organizational phenomena. We are quite good at identifying the consequences of our organizations and organized discourses and provoking thought. I would urge us to think more toward provoking dialogs. Again, as David reminded us in the Manifesto, postmodern life means wandering audiences chasing fragmenting storylines. Dialogs help us make sense of the storylines, put the discourses together into something meaningful. As we provoke the holders of power, individual or corporate, we should invite their response, for in doing so, we create a dialog. We invent the potential for change to occur.

Focus on the Values. But, how should we proceed in inventing the potential for change to occur, for inventing that shared discourse of mutual awareness? I argue that we should focus on creating our dialogs around powerful, shared values that connect us all. Discourses are inherently value based. To the extent that we share values as a culture or as a people, we can act socially. We can do things together. To the extent that we share values, we can create invitational dialogs.

What this means is that in our writing, we articulate the consequences we find and we formulate our arguments in terms of powerful, difficult to resist, and commonly shared values. For example, note how David's work provokes us to engage the dehumanization inherent in sweatshops. In the present set of articles, note how Helen, Julie, and Marilyn key their arguments around the issues of ethnocentrism and paternalism. Fairness, dignity, equity, tolerance, and nurturing are but a few of the values that bind us together as social human beings in an organized world. When we make arguments rooted in fairness, equity, and the like, we provoke a response less about efficiency, effectiveness, and profitability and more about the quality of human life. Once "we" agree that we are discussing a problem with the quality of human life, "we" have taken a step toward resolving the issues that divide us. But, we critical postmodern organization scientists face another problem. While we can battle the beast of anti-intellectualism, we often butt our heads against the wall of anti-organization. We get the bad rap of being positioned as radicals who want to dismantle the world of work as everyone knows it and take away everybody's small slice of the good life. It is a simplistic stereotype, but it has a lot of currency. We readily create dialogs about organizations doing "good," acting in moral and ethical ways. Granted, we mostly tend to focus on the "not doing good" side as we write a lot about how organizations act unethically. But we tend, generally, to distance ourselves from helping organizations do well, to be successful, effective, and profitable. For us to be truly invitational, we need to engage strongly the applied side of organizational life. We need teach organizations how to inject ethics into strategic plans. We need to teach organizations how to assess the values that underlie their actions. We need to help organizations invite the discussion of the quality of worker life onto the discursive table as a key element of the organization doing well and doing good (for a more thorough discussion of "doing well" and "doing good" is this context, see Barker, 1999, pp). Both Steve's discussion of knowledge management and Helen, Julie, and Marilyn's discussion of international human resource management, while mostly conscious raising, do nudge us gently toward the applied side. I want us to do more. I want us to embrace it. If we only concern ourselves with whether or not organizations do good and abandon the need to help organizations do well, we will have taken the sure path to oblivion. Develop Our Critical Pedagogy. As David discusses in the Manifesto, a critical pedagogy is vital to our interests. And, he is right on. If we want to be invitational, if we want change, then let's concentrate on what we do day-in and day-out. We can help students learn the value of openmindedness and tolerance - not just in human relations but also in corporate finance, in strategy, in organizational theory, in marketing, and so forth. We can teach the usefulness of managers assessing the values that motivate their actions, of an open discussion about the "human" merits of business decisions. Toward the end of Steve's article on

knowledge management, he discusses courses of study in the new Swedish Executive Ph.D.,

[T]he business doctoral students acquire habits of mind that were not part of their undergraduate degree training (usually in narrow technical subjects) and have not been especially fostered in the business environments where they have been working. These include tolerance, respect and capacity for sustained reading, rigour, abstraction, synthesis, and criticism. Indeed, the Executive Ph.D. programme addresses the problem of corporate amnesia quite literally by teaching students how to institutionalise a corporate conversation that continually rehearses the history and re-plots the aims of the organisation, in light of current practice.

Sounds good right? So, why limit such a good thing to doctoral work? As David implies in the Manifesto, our task is to bring a critical pedagogy to all the classes we teach.

In my own work, which is all undergraduate teaching, I struggle with how to bring critical perspectives into classes demanding narrow technical expertise. My tactic for helping my students become more invitational managers is to focus my energy on critical thinking skills. I try to teach my students to see the need for open discussions about values, to see the importance of dissenting opinions in organizational decision making, to see the human costs of organized work as an issue they must address as managers. Granted it's a small part of the puzzle, but it works. The more we open minds, the more we create the conditions for us all to be invitational in the organization.

You Might Say that I'm a Dreamer. When I write, as I have done above, about discourse, values, and "being invitational," I am often accused of being simplistic and of "taking a leap of faith" by putting so much stock in the human ability to use language. My response to such criticism is to say, "Right . . ." and wait for a response. That response usually gives me insight into what is really upsetting my accuser and gives us the beginning of a useful, invitational dialog.

I choose to put my faith in our human ability to use language, in our ability to create discourses that solve our problems.- As a critical postmodern organization scientist, I see the rhetorical cannon of "invention" as the greatest invention we humans have created. Discursively, "being invitational" helps us critical postmodern organization scientists move from being simply oppositional to being collaborators, to creating something new. So, let's get on with it.

Cheers, Tamara!

[Author Affiliation]

James R. Barker is an Associate Professor of Organizational Theory and Strategy and Director of Research in the Department of Management at the U.S. Air Force Academy. His research interests include the development of organizational control systems and the consequences of innovation and restructuring on organizational systems and practices.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

Author(s): James R Barker

Publication title: Tamara : Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science. Las Cruces: 2001. Vol. 1, Iss. 1; pg. 25, 3 pgs

Supplement: Inaugural Issue

Source Type: Periodical

ISSN/ISBN: 15325555

Text Word Count 1774