Foreword II: Some Challenges of Collaborative Research

Contemporary writing in the natural, social, and management sciences indicates some fundamental changes in the social production of knowledge (Gibbons et al., 1994; Nowotny, Scott, & Gibbons, 2001; Pettigrew, 1997, 2001; Ziman, 1994). The changes include who is involved in the production of knowledge, the process of knowledge production and types of available knowledge, new levels of international collaboration in research, and new settings and opportunities for knowledge production, dissemination, and use. This thesis of a change in the character of knowledge production rests on a broad-ranging theoretical and empirical argument. Nowotny and colleagues (2001) characterize this as a co-evolutionary process between science and society. The elements of the change are many, but the most often detailed ones include the following:

- A more porous boundary between science and society
- A resultant loss of researcher autonomy
- A breakdown of assumptions about unitary views of science and linear notions of the scientific process
- A greater range of participants in the knowledge development process and greater pluralism of research practice
- A greater recognition of the localized (in time and space) character of research practice and outcomes
- A wider recognition of the emergent, rather than planned, views of the research process
- A recognition of the complex interactions among multiple stakeholders in the research process and a more contested landscape for evaluating the quality and relevance of research processes, outputs, and outcomes

These elements, and the forces driving them, are themselves contested. Even the advocates of a change thesis, such as Gibbons and colleagues (1994) and Ziman (1994), recognize that the process is still emergent, that

the rate of change varies in different national and disciplinary communities, and that responses are predictably customized to local institutional, professional, and resource conditions (see also Whitley, 2000). There exists a lively debate about the extent of convergence and divergence of knowledge production among scientific communities in various parts of the world. The normative attraction of the divergent science position is linked to the pragmatic virtues of pluralism in social science (Morgan, 1983; Pettigrew, 2001). One of the lessons from the natural history of the development of the social sciences is that there can be no one best way in which to frame, produce, disseminate, and use knowledge.

The force of these debates about a new social production of knowledge is also penetrating the various fields of management. A recent special issue of the *British Journal of Management* (Hodgkinson, 2001) is a useful place to find the variety of perspectives that exist in the United Kingdom and the United States. The current edited collection, *Collaborative Research in Organizations,* offers an insight into Scandinavian, French, and American sets of experiences. Collaboration and partnering between those in university settings and those in nonuniversity settings is now an increasing feature of knowledge production in the management field and is frequently tied to the aspiration that management knowledge should meet the double hurdle of scholarly quality and relevance (MacLean, MacIntosh, & Grant, 2002; Pettigrew, 1997). The debates on collaboration are also multifaceted, but within them are a number of partially contested assumptions. First, there is the view that collaborative knowledge production is intrinsically superior to unrestrained competition. Second, collaboration offers greater efficiency and value for the money in the use of public and private sector research funds. Third, collaboration can add real tangible value in scholarly research. Through collaboration, we can deliver research outcomes that are not possible with solo or single-team scholarship.

These general observations on collaborative research demand the unpacking of the term *collaboration.* In Chapter 5 of this volume, collaborative research is defined as *an emergent and systematic inquiry process, embedded in a true partnership between researchers and members of a living system for the purpose of generating actionable scientific knowledge.* This is a noble ambition that taps into long-term debates in the social sciences about "knowledge for what purpose" (Lynd, 1939) as well as the humanistic desires of many social and management scientists to both engage with and intervene in the settings they study. Collaborative and interventionist forms of inquiry remain a minority taste in the social sciences. In Part IV of the book, Niclas Adler, Rami Shani, and Alexander Styhre are careful to note the epistemological, political, ethical, and efficiency critiques directed at various kinds of collaborative research. These criticisms are, of course, relative to other forms of inquiry, which themselves have their strengths and weaknesses. There is indeed no one best way in which to frame, produce, disseminate, and use knowledge.

But the word *collaboration* in the context of research activities not only needs unpacking (as this volume begins to do) but also needs theorizing and locating within the more general set of experiences captured under the phrase *collaborative working*. Recent writing on collaboration by Huxham and Vangen (2000) and Huxham and Beech (2003) may offer such a liberating opportunity. One crucial feature of research collaboration not elaborated in this volume, and yet the basis of the reported research studies that are of enormous practical significance, is the rise of international collaborative research in the natural sciences and, increasingly, the social sciences. The management of dispersed research and development collaboration is now crucial in university-, industry-, and government-based science (Boutellier, Cassman, & Von Zeowitz, 1999). Recently, there has been growth in the number of large-scale international collaboration studies in management. Notable examples on both sides of the Atlantic include the GLOBE leadership research (House, Javidan, Hawges, & Dorfman, 2002), the CRANET research on international human resource management (Brewster, Tregaskis, Hegewisch, & Mayne, 1996; Tregaskis, Mahoney, & Atterbury, 2003), and the INNFORM program of research on innovative forms of organizing and company performance (Pettigrew & Fenton, 2000; Pettigrew et al., 2003). The INNFORM program addressed two collaborative themes: scholarly collaboration between geographically dispersed teams and the co-production and co-dissemination of knowledge between those in university settings and those in nonuniversity settings. The experiments in collaborative research chronicled in this volume are timely and important. With this greater openness to research practice come greater possibilities for learning but also some real challenges. Collaborative research may well bring greater complexities and transaction costs in the research process. Will the benefits outweigh the costs? What additional intellectual, social, and political skills are demanded of everyone in these kinds of knowledge production? What are the special challenges imposed on those who coordinate or lead this kind of research, and how do we prepare future generations of scholars to be motivated and skillful in collaborative research? Finally, what kind of knowledge will emanate from collaborative research, and what reception will that knowledge have among scholars, practitioners, and policymakers? These are some of the big questions stimulated by this book. The answers to these important questions will, of course, emerge only after considerable time and extensive debate.

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