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Authors

Bartunek, Jean M
Cummings, Thomas G
Pearce, Jone L
[et al.](#)

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EDITORS' SPECIAL

Leading What Seems (to Its Leaders, at Least) to Be an Incentiveless, Learningless Organization That Sometimes Appears (to Its Leaders, at Least) to Work

JEAN M. BARTUNEK

Boston College

THOMAS G. CUMMINGS

University of Southern California

JONE L. PEARCE

University of California, Irvine

DENISE M. ROUSSEAU

Carnegie Mellon University

ROSALIE L. TUNG

Simon Fraser University

ANDREW H. VAN DE VEN

University of Minnesota

NANCY URBANOWICZ

TERESE M. LONCAR

Academy of Management

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The purposes of the dialogue section of the *Journal of Management Inquiry* include "promoting active, constructive exchanges between proponents of differing points of view, focus-

ing on emergent ideas, practical issues, theories, and modes of inquiry." Several articles published in the dialogue section throughout the years have helped to accomplish these purposes (e.g., Bartunek et al., 1997;

Bird, Osland, Mendenhall, & Schneider, 1999; Putnam, Bantz, Deetz, Mumby, & Van Maanen, 1993).

Most of the dialogues published in *JMI*, quite understandably, contain such constructive exchanges wholly within the written article. The dialogue presented in this article is designed to be a little different. Rather than contain the whole of a conversation within this article, we want to use this publication to open up a discussion with our article's readers.

The dialogue published here is taken from a discussion among the executive committee members, executive director, and assistant executive director of the Academy of Management (AOM). It occurred in June 2002 during the academy's annual executive committee retreat,¹ which took place that year at Boston College. We tape-recorded the discussion and had it transcribed.

The executive committee and other members of the board of governors had just learned from results of the AOM membership survey that had been distributed and analyzed that spring by a task force headed by Dick Woodman (Texas A&M University) and Steve Borgatti (Boston College) (<http://www.aom.pace.edu/survey/>) that many members of the academy don't feel that the board of governors is very responsive to them.² This is a concern, because the board feels that it is trying to be responsive. We know, however, that most of our communication efforts are fairly formal, such as through presidents' columns in the academy newsletter and through publishing highlights of minutes of board meetings on the academy Web site. Maybe there's a better way that the executive committee (if not the board as a whole) can connect with academy members in a less formal fashion.

This dialogue represents one such attempt. In this article, we introduce some topics that we discussed at the executive committee retreat during a time that we set apart for reflection, and we present our discussion of each one; the topics were designed to surface a wide range of the participants' experiences and reflections. We also include information in the footnotes section about specific academy responsibilities or activities that should be useful additions to the conversation.

We expect that in the conversation, you're going to find some things you agree with, some things you totally disagree with, some things you don't understand, and, perhaps, some new ideas you'd like to

engage with us. Thus, we conclude each topic with an invitation to you as readers to add your comments by e-mailing one or more of us. If we receive a note from you, we will forward it to the other participants in this conversation and respond to you. We hope that through this approach, we will be able to involve readers of this journal in our discussion.

The participants in our June 2002 discussion, their positions in the academy at that time, and their e-mail addresses are

Andy Van de Ven (2001-2002 past president),
avandeven@csom.umn.edu

Jean M. Bartunek (2001-2002 president), bartunek@bc.edu

Jone L. Pearce (2001-2002 president-elect), jlpearce@uci.edu

Rosalie L. Tung (2001-2002 vice president and program chair), tung@sfu.ca

Denise M. Rousseau (2001-2002 vice president-elect and program chair-elect), rousseau@andrew.cmu.edu

Tom G. Cummings (newly elected as incoming vice president-elect and program chair-elect), thomas.cummings@marshall.usc.edu

Nancy Urbanowicz (executive director of the Academy of Management), nurbanowicz@pace.edu

Terese M. Loncar (assistant executive director of the Academy of Management), tloncar@pace.edu

Currently (2003), Jone Pearce is president of the academy and Andy Van de Ven has rotated off the board of governors. The other executive committee members (Jean, Rosalie, Denise, and Tom) have each moved to the next position on the executive committee. Jone led the discussion of each of the topics.

Topic: What have been your surprises about the governance of the academy?

Denise: How much there is to learn [laughter], how important it is that this is a member-driven organization, and how difficult it is to find ways to encourage broader participation to make that really true.

Jone: Why is it difficult?

Rosalie: While most members know about the products and services provided by the academy, such as the annual meetings and journals, except for a small minority, the functioning and the governance of the academy remain a mystery. Most members don't know how the nomination slate for election of board members and officers is developed. Most people don't know what the board does, how many board meetings there are in a year, and what happens at these meetings. They know that something goes

on because somehow these products and services are offered and delivered. Take the annual meetings, for example. Most people don't know that the reason why we are able to host a successful meeting for thousands of people every year is the tremendous amount of volunteer time and energy that goes into them. Many think, for example, that the program chair has a large number of paid staff members to help them put together the annual meeting. They also don't know the tremendous lead time it takes to pull off an event of this magnitude. That's why some complain about a submission deadline that is immediately after New Year. I believe we have to do a much better job in getting word out to the members at large what the board does. To many, the board members are just smiling faces that sit at the head table at the annual presidential luncheon.

Denise: I think many people, not just outside of the U.S., feel that this is a black box; nobody understands how it works. In fact, I think the board really tries to be inclusive. But many people don't know how people got selected to positions. And I think sometimes this is the reason why they don't volunteer.

Jone: That's where I think our size hurts us.³ I know from my own study of volunteers that most people volunteer because of a social connection, a direct linkage to someone else in the organization. Somebody they know drags them in, and if volunteers like it, they stay with it. Because we're so large, maybe we have more difficulty getting that direct social connection, because few people will volunteer for a black box.

Jean: One thing that surprised me is that people think that some processes are much easier than they are. Tasks that look simple on the outside, like paying with a credit card to register or getting a distinguished executive speaker, are sometimes unbelievably complicated to actually do. I think a lot of people write and say, "Do this," and they don't have any idea what all is involved in it.

Nancy: What has surprised me is the length of service and the willingness of people to contribute for a five-year term on the executive committee, and prior to that probably three on the board, and then some divisional activity.⁴ And the caliber of the people on the board—in my eight years of being here, I haven't run across any year in which people were on it for the wrong reasons. So it's somewhat disheartening in the membership survey to hear things about elitism or perceptions of "What are those folks doing?" because I've never seen what they're doing for anything other than good intentions for the organization.

Tom: What's also interesting about the black box is that when things are running well, you don't see it. It's when it isn't running well, for whatever reason, that people question, "What's going on?" If we're running well, people don't want to see any of the behind-the-scenes work.

Denise: What you're saying is actually that the academy is supposed to be a high-reliability organization. It's supposed to operate in a way that can be taken for granted, like Pacific Gas and Electric or the telephone company. And it's only when services are down that it becomes salient. And the issue there is that you only get negative feedback, because if the lights go on, they were supposed to go on.

Jean: Like the program is just supposed to go smoothly, right? You're never supposed to have trouble submitting. [Laughter.]

Rosalie: I think this is particularly true of the annual meetings. Prior to doing this job, I never realized how much

work, time, and effort the program chair has to put into it. When some minor snags occur, you hear people complain vehemently about how they dislike this and that. When there is a system crash and submission numbers disappear from the program Web developer, the program chair gets blamed. Seldom do you get a pat on the back when things are well and running smoothly.

Jone: One thing that I think is interesting is how much this is a true volunteer-run organization compared to many other professional associations that have large paid staffs and high dues. We have relatively low dues because our colleague-volunteers do a lot of the detail work; for example, every single year, local arrangements committees negotiate with hotels. There are some real advantages and real disadvantages to this structure. The advantages are that colleagues know better what will make the members happy, and we get lots of fresh ideas because there are always new people. The disadvantages are that we take up way too much of some volunteers' time, and reliability slips. But I don't think the members quite realize that this is a really big organization that runs on volunteer labor. If we costed out the labor at our colleagues' consulting or executive-education rates. . . .

Denise: We can't afford us. [Laughter.]

Jone: If we really had to pay for all of these services, this organization would be huge. And frankly, the quality of service that this organization gets sometimes is very high because they get people who know about management and are thoughtful and working hard.

Invitation to readers: As you can see in the above dialogue, it is the executive committee members' experience that many academy members do not really know how to get things accomplished in the academy. In addition, some of the surprises they have experienced regarding governance have had some apparently contradictory features. For example, there are difficulties in involving people in activities, although at the same time there are many wonderful volunteers. In addition, some tasks that seem simple on the outside are actually quite complex (especially for people who have never performed these tasks before), and thus mistakes are made in carrying them out. The amount of service that academy members receive is much more than it would be if the financial costs were calculated, because so much of it is on a volunteer basis.

Do you agree with this discussion? Are you surprised by it? What would you like to add to it? What might be done about some of the dilemmas raised?

Topic: What works well?

What doesn't work so well?

Denise: The academy office works well.

Nancy: Not according to the survey. According to the survey, we function at a lesser rate than the Web site.⁵ [Laughter.]

Jean: Yes, but you're not anywhere near as bad as the board of governors. [Laughter.]

Jone: I had a colleague from an unnamed information-systems academic association who went to our Web page for some reason and was shocked to find that our Web page was so much better than the one his association had. This has become an embarrassment: "How could the management people have a better Web page than us? This is terrible."

Tom: I think another thing that works well is that our fundamental governance structure's right. The way it's set up and the way the committees are, the way the board has evolved, the executive committee, and so forth . . . it's fundamentally a good design.

Jone: We can be specific. One of the structures I think works well is our decentralization down to the divisions. The divisions run their own programs; they run their own finances. The divisions have certain academy-wide rules they must follow that are pretty basic, like "Don't steal." But even our way of monitoring their behavior is five-year reviews rather than direct supervision.⁶ The academy is really a kind of federation of divisions.

Rosalie: If I may, I would like to play the role of the devil's advocate and say that this decentralization also has its drawbacks. There's no uniformity or consistency among the divisions and interest groups. Some of them are very well run, and some are not. I know that each division and interest group is reviewed every couple of years. However, the question is, How do we allow the divisions to be autonomous on the one hand and yet maintain enough consistency across all the divisions?

Denise: It's an interesting idea to want variation as is necessary and appropriate to different constituents, and yet have some management practices that avoid some of the pitfalls with decentralization. Nothing is ever going to be completely captured in a document. You really have to learn a lot by doing.

Tom: The other thing that I think we do well, and I said this when I completed my term as representative at large, is how carefully decisions are made. I always went home saying, "Wow, people listen." It still is impressive to me, how much care goes into decisions, even some small decisions. Now, the down side of that is that we're slower. It's amazing to me. At my school, we don't come close to how we make decisions at this caring level.

Jone: That was my reaction after my first board meeting, when I came back to my colleagues, and they said, "Well, what's it like on the academy board?" I said, "It's like a faculty meeting but without the 'rude term.'" [Laughter.] Because I think that because of all these different offices over all this time, you screen people out at the division level. If somebody really behaves obnoxiously, they definitely don't get asked back. [Laughter.] People are pretty nice and really willing to take a broad view. But there are apt to be some more negatives. Rosalie named one, which is this overdecentralization and then inconsistency. I'm sure there are others.

Nancy: I'm not sure that having the program chair and program chair-elect on the executive committee is a good structure.⁷ I think we lose, to a good degree, two valuable people for a long period of time. We focus on the annual meeting maybe to the exclusion of thinking about other educational needs of the organization, and we turn to the meeting to solve a lot of our problems because everyone who's in the executive committee has come up from that base. I think it does sometimes cloud our ability to see beyond the annual meeting as the solution and as the key

thing that members really want when we see from the survey that thousands don't go to the meeting.

Rosalie: The other issue that was raised in the survey is that the academy is very much dominated by the United States. There is nothing inherently wrong with that. It's just that many people from outside the United States feel that they're excluded from the decision-making process. They have no involvement whatsoever except for attendance at the annual meetings and submitting papers to and reading the academy's journals. This issue of the exclusion of non-Americans comes up over and over again in my conversations with others. So the challenge is, "How do we overcome that image, and what are some of the concrete measures that we can take to be more inclusive?"

Denise: It's an interesting problem. I know that when trying to put together the shared interest track last year,⁸ I purposely tried to bring in scholars from outside the United States as chairs of the sessions. And then I learned that none of them were coming to the academy meeting. What they said was that unless they had a paper in, they don't feel compelled to participate in the organization. It becomes harder then to find conventional ways of participation for non-U.S. members or nonregular attendees at the convention. How do we make it easier for people to be involved so that they will get committed to coming?

Jone: I'd like to add to Rosalie's point because I think there certainly are people who feel excluded. There are other groups underrepresented in the governance of the academy too, such as colleagues who are primarily from teaching schools, even though they are the vast majority of our members. A lot of them complain that only people who've published a lot will tend to get elected to academy-wide offices.

Denise: It's institutional.

Jone: I don't think we've found a good way yet to help more of our colleagues get more involved in academy governance. If they feel excluded and don't already know an active volunteer, it is difficult.

Jean: We also have from the survey that the thing that was ranked lowest of anything was the responsiveness of the board of the governors. So we might think we're doing a lot but somehow it's not coming across. . . .

Jone: We think we're listening and working hard to include, and we're working so many hours, and aren't we wonderful? And the members say, "No, you're not wonderful." [Laughter.]

Rosalie: How do we try to correct this? I think the academy has taken important steps to make the organization more user- and member-friendly. Thanks to the work of our IT people, recent Web developments¹⁰ such as "My Academy Online" and other hotlinks have made it easier for people to find out what a particular division does, etc. That's just the beginning, however. We as a board still need to get the message out to the broad membership that we are there for our members because we are all members of this one big family called the academy. We should try to eliminate this "we/they" distinction—"we", the board, and "they", the members at large.

Jone: Do we post our board minutes on the Web?

Nancy: We have the highlights on the Web.

Jone: I think what we could do is post the minutes.

Jean: That, I think, would be more boring. [Laughter.]

Jone: Well, yeah, horribly boring.

Nancy: They're available if somebody wants them.

Jone: But we could post a description of what the board does, and how you get on the board and how to get the full minutes, at least for those who do want to know. This could help make it a little more transparent.

Andy: I've learned how pluralistic the field of management education is worldwide. The academy itself is a small part of that very large and very dynamic field, which has dramatically different growth rates between consulting and practice as well as scholarship. The field of scholarship, which is a much smaller part of management education than are training and development, or consulting, is itself incredibly pluralistic with many different parallels. What surprises me is, on the one hand, the tremendous effort that is genuinely made by divisions and by the board, and its executive committee, to reflect an appreciation and sensitivity to that pluralism. On the other hand, it is impossible to be all things to all people and to incorporate all of the field's diversity within this academy. I think the academy has adopted a wise strategy of reaching out, establishing relationships with other associations, and providing members access to this pluralistic field of management scholarship.

Jone: It's not just different points of view; it's also conflicting functions.

Andy: Absolutely.

Jone: The academy is also in the business of accepting some research papers and not accepting others. We also do work for merit-evaluation committees, particularly at North American universities; these committees want to see some independent evidence of a piece of research's scholarly importance.¹¹ We differentiate among our members in ways that have real consequences for them, and this interferes with our ability to be accepting and welcoming in other parts of our organization where we want to do that. These are conflicting academy functions. If your paper has been rejected, then how can you feel accepted? It's hard for people emotionally.

Jean: One thing that is really important for me about what Andy's saying right now and that I learned from you [Andy] and from your writing, too, is that being able to handle the tensions of the different conflicting things that are going on is one of the most important roles that the board can play. And not to get caught on one side or the other, but to say that the academy is a pluralistic home, and we will try to be open to different perspectives, but in a way that we all still are speaking to each other, or at least in the same room as somebody speaking to somebody else. [Laughter.]

Rosalie: I want to bring up the issue of the size of the annual meetings. Size is, of course, good from the standpoint that it shows that people are interested in what we are doing. On the other hand, however, have we reached that critical point? What is the next step?

Jone: Or what are we going to do? Crank up our acceptance rate and take a smaller percentage of submissions?

Tom: I think what Rosalie says is correct when we think of us as coming together physically. In the grand scheme of things, we're at just the bottom part of the S curve of what's going to happen with information technology and being able to link ourselves, even where I can see you and you can see me, far more often than having to physically be together. And that will open a whole new realm.

Denise: It's an interesting problem, whether it's a numbers issue or it's a structure, format, and organizing issue. Do we know how to organize for this sort of cross-national crossroads that we've become in a way that maximizes

interaction and the quality of the experience? I don't know if we've thought about it that way yet.

Tom: If we use that criterion here, we probably wouldn't have many paper sessions. We probably wouldn't have many things where there'd be one person standing up talking at a bunch of people, like I do in my megaclassrooms. We'd say, "Wow, we've got three precious days a year. How do I now maximize the quality of the interaction?" We'd probably pull out a lot of what's there. Then, of course, there's the other competing demand that without a paper I can't go to the meeting.

Jone: That's the problem. We have this American business school personnel incentive structure that basically is a big constraint on a lot of things that we might be able to do.

Invitation to readers: As you can see from the above dialogue, the discussion of the pluses and minuses and the advantages and disadvantages of the academy structure raised some dilemmas and apparent contradictions just as the prior topic had, and some of what was said here linked with the prior discussion. The problems with the Web site that were apparent to IT staff were not apparent to academy members. There is very good decentralization of the divisions, but this raises problems associated with the variability of their governance. There is a general sense on the part of the leadership that the divisions and the board operate in a caring, thoughtful, and listening way—but many members don't see it that way. The annual meeting is very important but may be relied on too much as the solution to academy problems. There are concerns about how to get members from a variety of circumstances, many of whom feel excluded, to feel that they have a voice in the academy and can participate in it. How do we do this but at the same time have a sense of coherence regarding our purposes? How do we act accepting despite the fact that part of our role is a judgmental one (e.g., rejecting papers)? How do we create a sense of community at the annual meetings and in a way that doesn't depend on them?

Do you agree with this discussion? Are you surprised by it? What would you like to add to it? What might be done about some of the dilemmas raised?

Topic: What frustrates you about your governance roles?

Jone: We are volunteers doing things we don't know how to do and will only do once. So sometimes we inadvertently offend people or make them angry. This is a constant of the academy, especially around the meeting. That's a definite negative, working so hard and still getting yelled at.

Nancy: We're hearing in the membership survey and elsewhere that we've got two major functions in the academy that try to be all things to all people. One is the journals. Members are asking, "Where is my specialty? This doesn't

meet my need." Also, the *Academy of Management Executive* is trying to serve executives and members at the same time, and the annual meeting is trying to serve international participants and domestic U.S. participants. I don't think we know how to structure for this.

Jone: And the Web is a wonderful resource, but it's not a substitute for those two things.

Nancy: No. And those two themes keep coming up in open-ended comments on the survey.

Denise: I think that's why Nancy's point is really important. Our aspirations have expanded, in that we expect more done but are meeting the same standards as in the past. And we've expanded the number of stakeholders whose interests we expect to serve.

Nancy: Yes, that's right.

Denise: With a structure that hasn't necessarily been . . . rethink, revised, transformed at each iteration.

Nancy: We're making incremental improvements in the journals by adding certain features, and incrementally in the annual meeting with the interactive papers¹² or what have you, but it's not radical enough.

Jone: And the meeting work is getting too big and too heavy and too burdensome on program chairs and local arrangements chairs. And it is creaky; I worry that it will collapse.

Jean: Yes. Part of the reason for that is that every time we develop some labor-saving device, like technology, we get all excited and say, "Okay, good, that's fixed. We can do these sixteen more things." [Laughter.] That's the problem. I think we do that every time somebody makes it easier for something to happen.

Denise: I'm actually all for the many flowers bloom approach. But we're better at launching than we are at sun-setting. [Laughter.] We accumulate the experiments of yesteryear that were successful in their time but maybe are no longer so useful or celebrated or valuable to people. And yet there's enough of an interest served that they're hard to let go.

Andy: A precedent set in one year seems to be viewed as an institution immediately.

Nancy: Immediately.

Jone: Unless it flames out.

Denise: We're just too good at saving these things.

Jone: It's true. Something new that works, then that's the way it is. And that's partly because every single year you're learning, and if you can see what somebody did the year before well, you copy it because what else are you going to do?

Andy: But notice the problem that that gets us into. As soon as someone does something, it sets a precedent. Then, the next year, it's expected to be followed, and if you choose not to follow the precedent that is viewed as a violation, a breach of contract [laughter], which in turn labels you as, "Hey, what are you, a heretic? Don't you belong to the system? Isn't this the way we always do things?"

Jone: This year, you [Rosalie] were brilliant not to fall into this trap. She dropped the audiotaping, which was a nightmare to try to get all those signatures, and then nobody bought them.¹³ So, finally, Rosalie had the great sense to say, "Do we have to do this?" Who even wants them? Who knows? People apparently buy only their own audiotapes, I guess to hear themselves. [Laughter.]

Nancy: A good example of this is that if you just looked seriously at the T-shirts with the facts, no emotion, no prece-

dents, no tradition, they would be gone. [Laughter.] They would have been gone five years ago.

Tom: Once you get this decentralized, it's very hard to change. And what we know about change of a very significant nature is that it's got to be driven from the top, and a lot of people are going to say, "This is terrible."

Nancy: And people come in for short periods of time, volunteering for something.

Tom: And that leads to incremental changes. We've made some great changes in efficiency, unbelievable.

Jone: But our bias in these positions is always to add something. I'm starting the presidential year next year, and I plan the three or four little add-ons I can do. But I should have said, "What are the four to five removals?" Nobody comes into a role and says, "What are the five things I can get rid of that are least useful?" That would be a different attitude that we don't have.

Denise: An interesting idea would be to think about our time here as partnerships to sustain some changes over time. Since most complex problems require multiphase solutions, we could think in terms of moving in the direction of such and such. And then we might create a process whereby we agree to partner: This first year or two, we'll do this, and then after that we're going to launch that. And then we'll bring the next people in with an understanding of where things might have to go from there. So we have a kind of a multiyear strategy in terms of implementing changes.

Jean: One of the thoughts that's been drifting through my head as I was listening to you all talk is about the larger role of stability versus change as a tension, in terms of the board in its relationships to other groups. Because if we were stable in what we did, and we were totally predictable, other groups like divisions would have a much easier time communicating with us, because they would know what's going on. I think some of them would like for us to be stable, except the times when they want to change something.

Andy: Oh, yes. [Laughter.]

Jean: But like Andy mentioned, if we do something once, it's seen as an institution. I think that some divisions say, "Well, this is the way the board does it." If you don't keep doing it the same way, even though it was just invented last year, then it's harder for them to know how to act.

Andy: Yes, but in a world of total predictability, you have stability and you have death, right?

Denise: But we have no death. We live forever; at least, our processes do!

Invitation to readers: This discussion focused on additional dilemmas associated with governing the academy. Volunteers are always learning, so they are often making someone angry. In some ways, we try to be all things to all people; our expectations have increased, but our structure has not expanded in a similar way. We make many incremental changes, usually additions to what has been done before, and these are almost automatically institutionalized. It is very hard to drop something that was done before, even if, logically, it should be dropped.

Do you agree with this discussion? Are you surprised by it? What would you like to add to it? What might be done about some of the dilemmas raised?

Topic: What have you learned about management from your positions on the executive committee?

Denise: You can't lead people to where they don't want to go. [Laughter.]

Jean: I have learned, Don't take on any management responsibility without knowing that Nancy Urbanowicz and Terese Loncar and a whole bunch of people at Pace University are there to back you up.¹⁴ [Laughter.]

Rosalie: For me, it was the incredible number of details that I had to attend to this year as program chair. We teach our students that a manager is supposed to deal with the overall picture and leave the specifics/details to others. This was definitely not the case. I think this stems from the fact that most of the people we work with are volunteers, so we couldn't simply pass the nasty work to others. I found that I have to learn so many new things, such as catering, decoration—pipes and drapes, audiovisual, etc. You have to cram all of this information into your head within a very short period of time. To me, this was not part of management or what a good manager should do. [Laughter.]

Nancy: That's our own unique definition of management.

Rosalie: Right. It's amazing how quickly you purge this new information from your head once the program is done.

Tom: I guess mine is, This is unlike everything I teach in business school. I teach businesses where there's hierarchy. There are reward systems. There's a board of directors often. There's an external measure of performance, ROI, and this and that. The managers tend to have a career in management. Here—think about it—you're here for five years in five different roles. By the time you get any kind of confidence that you know what you're talking about, you're gone!

Denise: It's true, absolutely. [Laughter.]

Tom: You're not really going to come out with anything radical to change things because you're not sure anyway, and you're not here all that long. If you could come back in four or five years, I'd bet people would say, "Hey, I know how to manage. Now we're going to try some radical things, in, say, membership." It's tough for us to say that. We don't know what we're doing, and by the time we do, we're gone.

Denise: It's like the Peter Principle on its side. We'd like to see a level of competence, and then we take you out of that job! [Laughter.]

Jean: You two [Nancy and Terese] are managing AOM headquarters. What have you learned about that?

Nancy: Before this position, I was the executive director of an association that was more staff driven than the academy, which is more volunteer driven. And I would have to say that although the two types of associations have equally large workloads, the volunteer organization is much more difficult to manage, definitely.

Jone: One thing I've learned is how much can get done by people of good will trying to solve a problem, no matter how screwed up their operating structure is. I think part of what Tom is talking about is this academy shouldn't function. It shouldn't exist. Where are the incentives?

Where is the learning? There is no hierarchy, no authority. None of these exists in this organization, yet it gets a lot of work done somehow. And the only way I can see how is that there are people who really do try to pitch in and try to make it work.

Nancy: Oh, that's true.

Jone: So people can make organizations work no matter how fouled up the structure.

Andy: One of the things that I also learned as program chair is to become a good project engineer, program manager. For the program chair, we have the most complex PERT chart that I've ever seen in terms of rows and columns and deadlines and mile poles, et cetera, with evaluation criteria and standards of quality far in excess of what is 99.5% acceptable. Then when you become president-elect and coordinate the divisions, then move on to be president, you need to become a good statesperson, politician. Just when you think you become a good program manager as program chair, which isn't a task where you become gifted in political skills [laughter], you've got to start all over. So the five years of being an academy officer have been an incredible training period for personal development, in skills that are far beyond, like Jone says, what you pick up in your own B School.

Jone: And you're constantly feeling like you don't quite know what you're doing.

Tom: And when you do, you're unlikely to take risks.

Terese: I'm listening to what everyone is saying and attempting to compare it to what I've learned so far about management as a first-year MBA student. At the academy, I have an advantage in being able to see the application of management by management educators. . . . [Laughter.]

Denise: Politely said. [Laugh.]

Terese: I'm not extremely knowledgeable about the subject yet, but I've seen how different and how varied all these educators have been through the years in their application of management to their roles. Some volunteers have tried to apply theory and maybe their personal research and study to their role. I think it's great to be able to bring your personal research or study to a specific volunteer role in the academy. I can see how that can be some kind of a reward in and of itself, but I still don't know what each of you feel is the reward for these roles. From a headquarters standpoint, we're supposed to provide some of the support and rewards to help you through the process—or at least we try to do that, because sometimes I don't see what the rewards are for you.

Jone: The *mystery* of why people do this.

Terese: Right: The mystery of the board of governors. Why would you subject yourself to this job? [Laughter.]

Jone: Well, why do people do it?

Nancy: I'm an English major. What else could I do? [Laughter.]

Terese: I mean, obviously, the spirit of volunteerism alone, regardless of the discipline, might be a reason. Or thinking in the spirit of giving back, especially to your profession that obviously has given a lot to you.

Jone: We have fun. We get to meet new, interesting people.

Nancy: Sometimes, I think it's this love of learning because [laugh] some of you walk away learning more things you'd ever care to know, like catering details. [Laughter.]

Jone: That's true. The long doctoral education grind gets us addicted to learning. [Laughter.]

Tom: Mine are instrumental far more than I think the rest of your reasons are. This is my profession. I'm going to be at the meeting anyway. I might as well run the goddamned thing. [Laughter.] When I played football at Cornell, I was the captain. Why not be? If you're going to be there anyway, why not do something?

Rosalie: I agree with Tom. Since I am in this profession and go to these meetings as part of my job, I might as well be actively involved. For me, a major motivation is the ability to make a difference or leave a mark, however tiny that is. For example, it was fun as program chair to be able to select the theme for the convention, and it was very gratifying to see people submitting papers and symposia on that theme.

Terese: But I have to admit that some of the staff at the headquarters office are amazed by what you're all able to bring to the table and not get a tangible reward. You know, you don't get a consolation prize at the end [laugh].

Jean: I have some complex motives. For example, one of them is that my father was the president of his professional association—the American College of Gastroenterology. That was a huge deal in our family that he was the president. I wish he had still been alive when I got elected. And there is stuff like, "Yeah, dad, I can do this too, even if I'm a girl." [Laughter.] And also, I care about this association immensely. I love this group, and this is a great chance to try to be helpful to it.

Jone: We'll stop it on that nice note.

Invitation to readers: This discussion started with a conversation about what we have learned about management from our roles on the executive committee and why we have undertaken these tasks, especially because it isn't always clear, especially to the AOM headquarters staff, what the rewards are. We've all learned many things about management that are inconsistent with what we teach. This is a situation of continual learning, and it appears that when we finally think we know what we're doing in one role, we move on to the next. There are many reasons why we have been interested in this series of positions, both professional and personal.

Do you agree with this discussion? Are you surprised by it? What would you like to add to it? What might be done about some of the dilemmas raised?

CONCLUSION

In this dialogue, members of the AOM Executive Committee, along with the executive director and assistant executive director of the academy, reflected on several facets of our experience in our positions. This reflection included several dilemmas we experience, some surprises, some frustration, and a strong

experience of continual learning. We hope that our conversation has opened up some of the board of governors' "black box" just a bit for you as readers. We welcome your reactions and feedback.

NOTES

1. The executive committee of the Academy of Management (AOM) (sometimes referred to as the academy officers) consists of the president, president-elect, vice president and program chair, vice president-elect, and past president. The executive committee participates in a 2-day retreat with the academy executive director and assistant executive director each year to discuss particular aspects of the academy in depth.

2. One set of questions on the survey had addressed how satisfied academy members were with several different facets of the academy (e.g., the journals, placement, and divisions). On a scale from 1 to 5, in which 1 indicates *not at all satisfied* and 5 indicates *very satisfied*, the responsiveness of the board of governors was rated 3.10, which was the lowest rating. Members were most satisfied with the journals (4.02).

3. At the time of this discussion, there were about 12,500 members in the academy. There are currently about 5,500 to 6,000 attendees at the annual meeting.

4. Although this is not universally true, academy members are not generally eligible for election to the board of governors until they have contributed significant service to one or more academy divisions or committees or have served in a leadership position in one of the academy affiliate associations. The affiliate associations are the five "regional" associations in the United States, the Iberoamerican Academy of Management, and the Asia Academy of Management. Generally, though not always, people are not eligible for election to the executive committee unless they have served on the board as a representative for 3 years.

5. Satisfaction with the Web site on the member survey was 3.93, one of the highest ratings. This was a surprise, because the executive committee, board, and AOM headquarters were painfully aware of many deficiencies and limitations of the Web site. From an IT perspective, it was cumbersome, not very informative, difficult to navigate, and inflexible.

6. Each division is formally reviewed every 5 years. This review includes, among other things, a survey that is distributed to all division members in which they are asked their opinion about how well the division is doing along several dimensions.

7. The progression of positions is from program chair-elect (in charge of the professional development workshops in the annual meeting) to vice president and program chair, president-elect and chair of the professional divisions, president, and then past president.

8. Shared-interest track (SIT) sessions were created to break down barriers between divisions by grouping

together papers from different divisions that deal with a common topic or issue. Generally, the vice president-elect creates these sessions from similar papers from multiple divisions that have already been accepted for the program.

9. At the annual meeting, the academy membership committee staffs a booth that provides information about volunteer opportunities on the various academy committees and activities. People who are interested in volunteering may wish to visit this booth.

10. In response to the experienced limits of the prior Web site, IT staff at AOM headquarters and several other volunteers had spent over a year developing a new, improved Web site with many more features. You can access it at the old Web site address, <http://www.aom.pace.edu>, or at the new one, <http://www.aomonline.org>.

11. Publication of articles in academy journals and presentation of papers at academy meetings often have impacts on tenure and promotion. Thus, scholarly participation in the academy sends signals to promotion committees.

12. Interactive paper sessions are grouped papers that are presented in a manner that encourages more discussion and interaction among authors and attendees than is possible during a traditional paper-presentation format.

13. For several years, beginning in the 1990s, some academy sessions were audiotaped with the expectation that many people would buy the audiotapes to have access to the sessions outside of the academy meeting. Audiotaping, however, turned out to be fairly expensive and difficult to do well, and relatively few people purchased the audiotapes. So, during the 2002 meeting it was dropped.

14. AOM headquarters is located at the Briarcliff Manor campus of Pace University. At the time of the 2002 executive committee retreat, there were 11 full-time staff members at headquarters.

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- JEAN M. BARTUNEK** is a professor in the Organization Studies Department at Boston College. Her Ph.D. in social and organizational psychology is from the University of Illinois at Chicago; prior to coming to Boston College, she was a visiting assistant professor in the organizational behavior group at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She has published over 70 journal articles and chapters. Her books include *Creating Alternative Realities at Work* (Harper, 1990), with Michael Moch; *Hidden Conflict in Organizations* (Sage, 1992), edited with Deborah Kolb; *Insider/Outsider Team Research* (Sage, 1996), with Meryl Louie; and *Organizational and Educational Change: The Life and Role of a Change Agent Group* (Erlbaum, 2003). Her primary substantive research interests concern intersections of social cognition, conflict, organizational change and transformation, and practitioner-academic interfaces. Her primary methodological research interests concern ways in which practitioners in a setting and outside researchers can collaborate in studying the setting. During 2001 and 2002, she was president of the Academy of Management.
- THOMAS G. CUMMINGS** is professor and chair of the Department of Management and Organization at the Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California. He has authored or coauthored 19 books including the critically acclaimed *Self-Designing Organizations: Learning How to Create High Performance and Organization Development and Change* (7th ed.). He was chair of the Organizational Development and Change Division of the Academy of Management, president of the Western Academy of Management, and member of the Board of Governors of the Academy of Management. He is currently associate editor of the *Journal of Organizational Behavior* and vice president/program chair-elect of the Academy of Management. His major research and consulting interests include designing high-performing organizations and strategic change management.
- JONE L. PEARCE** is professor of organization and strategy in the Graduate School of Management, University of California, Irvine. Her doctorate in administrative sciences is from Yale University. Her field is organizational behavior, and she conducts research on workplace interpersonal processes such as trust and on how these processes may be affected by political structures, economic conditions, and organizational policies and practices. Her work has appeared in over 70 scholarly articles in such publications as the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, and *Organization Science*. She has edited several volumes and written two scholarly books, *Volunteers: The Organizational Behavior of Unpaid Workers* (Routledge, 1993) and *Organization and Management in the Embrace of Government* (Erlbaum 2001). She currently serves on the editorial board of *Human Relations* and the *Journal of Applied Psychology*. She is a fellow of the Academy of Management, and her honors include several major research grants, several teaching excellence awards, and an invitation to testify on legislation pending before the U.S. House of Representatives. She was president of the Western Academy of Management from 1995 to 1996. She was a representative at large on the Board of Governors of the Academy of Management from 1995 to 1998, program chair for the 2001 annual meeting, and president of the Academy of Management from 2002 to 2003.
- DENISE M. ROUSSEAU** is H. J. Heinz II Professor of Organizational Behavior at Carnegie Mellon University, jointly in the Heinz School of Public Policy and Management and in the Graduate School of Industrial Administration. Her research focuses on the psychological contract and on change in the employment relationship. Her books include *Relational Wealth: Advantages of Stability in a Changing Economy* (Oxford), with Carrie Leana; *Psychological Contracts in Employment: Cross-National Perspectives* (Sage), with Rene Schalk; *Developing an Interdisciplinary Science of Organizations* (Jossey-Bass), with Karlene Roberts and Charles Hulin; and *The Boundaryless Career* (Oxford), with Michael Arthur. Her book *Psychological Contracts in Organizations: Understanding Written and Unwritten Agreements* (Sage) won the Academy of Management's 1996 Terry Award. She is a fellow in the Academy of Management, American Psychological Association, and Society for Industrial/Organizational Psychology, and she is editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. She is vice president of the Acad-

emy of Management and 2003 program chair for its annual meeting, which will be held in Seattle, Washington, on August 1 through 6.

ROSALIE L. TUNG is a professor of international business at Simon Fraser University, Canada. She holds the Ming and Stella Wong Chaired Professorship. She was formerly a Wisconsin Distinguished Professor, Business Administration, with the University of Wisconsin system. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and the Academy of Management. She has published widely on the subjects of international management in such publications as the *Journal of World Business*, *Organizational Dynamics*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Academy of Management Executive*, and *Academy of Management Journal*. She is the author or editor of 10 books, including the *IEBM Handbook of International Business* (Thomson Learning) and *Learning from World Class Companies* (Thomson Learning). She serves as editor of international human resource management for the *Journal of World Business* and is a consulting editor for the *Journal of International Business Studies*. She is president-elect of the Academy of Management and served as program chair for the 2002 annual meeting of the Academy of Management.

ANDREW H. VAN DE VEN is Vernon H. Heath Professor of Organizational Innovation and Change in the Carlson School of Management of the University of Minnesota. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1972, and he taught at Kent State University and the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania before his present

appointment. He directed the Minnesota Innovation Research Program that tracked a wide variety of innovations from concept to implementation during the 1980s. Since 1993, he has been conducting a longitudinal real-time study of changes in health care organizations. He is coauthor of *The Innovation Journey* (1999), *Organizational Change and Innovation Processes: Theory and Methods for Research* (2000), and *Research on the Management of Innovation: The Minnesota Studies* (1989, reprinted 2000), all published by Oxford University Press. He was the 2000 to 2001 president of the Academy of Management.

NANCY URBANOWICZ is the executive director of the Academy of Management, a professional society of more than 12,000 management scholars and practitioners. She has spent her entire professional career managing associations. She has worked for the Academy of Management for the past 9 years and previously served as the executive director of a large engineering society. Her bachelor's degree is in English from DePaul University, and her master's degree is in communication from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

TERESE M. LONCAR, the assistant executive director of the Academy of Management, started her career in the publishing industry with McGraw-Hill and Random House. In 1994, she changed careers and ventured into association management, joining the Academy of Management, where she says the rewards of working with volunteers far surpass editing books. She has developed into an association executive due to the direction of Nancy Urbanowicz and is pursuing an MBA at Pace University.