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Auto-Tuned Voices: Why do we Distort the Pig Iron Tales

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**Submission Template for the
2014 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators**

1) Title of Proposal:

Auto-Tuned Voices: Why do we Distort the Pig Iron Tales?

2) Abstract:

Please include a brief session description (not to exceed 100 words). You will also be asked to submit this abstract again into the submission system. If your proposal is accepted, this description will be printed in the conference program.

This interactive discussion will use the mis-telling of F. W. Taylor's Pig Iron tales as a springboard for exploring the importance of management history and story-telling in our classrooms. Drawing from the research in story-telling pedagogy and the philosophy of history we will further explore the criteria by which our historical tales should be told.

3) Keywords:

Use three or four keywords to describe your session.

Scientific Management, Management History, Story-telling, Textbooks

4) Format

- Activity or exercise
- Discussion roundtable (60 minute only)
- General discussion session

5) Time Requested:

30 Minutes

60 Minutes (*Roundtables must select 60 minutes*)

90 Minutes

6) Planning Details:

Does your session have any special requirements for space or materials?

We would like (but do not require):

- a chalk/white board
- projection equipment

7) Learning Objectives or Goals for the Session:

- Participants will *examine their reasons* for **telling stories and using lessons from history**, will *learn from others* about same and *learn what research and theory says* about same.
- Participants will learn of some of the **inaccuracies of Frederick Taylor's "Pig Iron Tales"**
- Participants will **examine the impact of truth vs. "object lessons"** in the effectiveness of story-telling

8) Management or Teaching Topics:

Describe what management and/or teaching topics are relevant to your session, and why. Are there theoretical, disciplinary, or theoretical foundations that will help reviewers understand how your ideas fit within the broader field of management?

Textbooks introduce students to historical events that have shaped the formation of a particular discipline. These textbooks may be the only material that students ever read regarding these historical events. Common in many principles of management textbooks is the inclusion of some level of discussion related to Frederick W. Taylor's scientific management studies. Taylor's pig-iron observations, a set of time-and-motion studies, were conducted in 1899 and have continually been used since then to describe how the implementation of scientific methods can reduce costs for organizations, lead to industrial efficiency, and lead to prosperity for employees (Wrege & Hodgetts, 2000). However, Wrege and Perroni (1974) used accounts of Taylor's pig-iron study,

his biography, his original papers, and original documents from one of his primary investigators in the pig-iron studies, and came to the conclusion that Taylor's story is "more fiction than fact" (pg. 7). Therefore, while Taylor's pig-iron observations are a "charming" story, many discrepancies and inconsistencies in his story have been revealed (Wren, 2005).

Bluedorn, Keon, and McCarter (1985) presented their results of an analysis of 25 introductory management textbooks regarding each book's account of Taylor's pig-iron studies. What these authors found was that 23 of the 25 textbooks discussed material about Taylor's pig-iron studies without making note of the validity issues raised by Wrege and Perroni (1974). This led Bluedorn and colleagues to the conclusion that Wrege and Perroni's work had a very minimal impact on textbook writers, and thus the management discipline.

We recognize the importance of Management history and the importance of story-telling and wish to explore (and help session participants explore) what role history and story-telling (and the intersection between the two) can, does, and/or should play in Management education. Why do we use history? Why do we tell stories and what role should historical accuracy play? We plan to draw from an understanding of textbook publishing, from the philosophical underpinnings of history and from a conceptual understanding of story-telling to help inform our interaction with session participants

In 2003, four prominent management textbook writers (Cameron, Ireland, Lussier, New, & Robbins, 2003) were invited to present views about the purposes, values, and ideologies that motivate their textbook writing. Their comments may be of use in explaining why textbook authors, in general, do or do not accurately reflect history.

First, all four authors in Cameron et al., (2003) maintain that academic research is the foundation for what they write in their textbooks. Textbook authors not only choose what topics they place in their books, but in addition they substantiate and justify the placement of the topics in their textbooks by citing research (Mir, 2003). Another author's comments may lead one to believe that the content and topics within management textbooks is a result of the actions of textbook publishers. This author notes that textbooks had better be interesting to be published, and that the "credibility of ideas is based not so much on whether they are right or true as it is on whether they are interesting" (Cameron et al., 2003: 724).

Some scholarly writers argue that stories may be used in management textbooks as a way of presenting an "object lesson" to students. Applied to Taylor's pig-iron stories, it is argued that the stories do not have to be presented as an exact account of what happened, but rather used as a tale to persuade individuals that Taylor's scientific management may

be able to provide improvements to work processes (Hough & White, 2001). Both scholars and textbook authors have been called to “accurately represent the philosophies of others by careful consideration of *original intent*” (Hough & White, 2001: 597 – italics in original).

Philosophical Underpinnings of Historicism

Another framework that may be useful in examining how Taylor’s stories are currently portrayed in management textbooks is that of the authors’ philosophy about Taylor’s work. Three philosophical perspectives of historicism in management are the deterministic, indeterministic, and underdeterministic views of history (Burrows, Kastantin, & Novicevic, 2004). Briefly, determinism may be described as “the past frames the present” (Novicevic, Harvey, Buckley, & Adams, 2008). A textbook author who has a deterministic view of history would primarily view what Taylor said as the everlasting truth, possibly ignoring later works that debunked his work. Conversely, taking the indeterministic historicist view of past research, such as Taylor’s studies, a textbook author would review Taylor’s work primarily as propaganda of managerialism (Novicevic et al., 2008). Finally, an underdeterministic view tries to balance historic evidence of past contributions to the extent that it would be important for the present (Novicevic et al., 2008). This view would evaluate Taylor’s work to find out what we really know about it (perhaps taking into account Wrege’s work) as a means of finding the contribution it makes.

Story-telling

It may be helpful to analyze the phenomenon of the mis-telling of Taylor’s accomplishments according to what we know about storytelling itself. If we apply scientific standards to the telling of stories we deprecate the total experience stories provide (McCurdy & Cleary, 1984). One difference is that telling a story engages the trust and commitment of listeners or readers more than does the mere transmission of information (Hummel, 1990). Further, science has to be placed in a familiar context in order to be understood and applied (Rein, 1976). Marques, Dhiman & Biberman (2011) suggested that stories be evaluated by such factors as intuitiveness, multiplicity of impacts, element of shock, and identification by the participants.

9) Session Description and Plan:

What will you actually do in this session? Include a timeline for your session.

In the spirit of OBTC, this will be a highly interactive session, so any attempt to create and enforce a timeline is at best a guess. We have a number of questions we want to explore and believe that a 60 minute session offers the best chance to explore them.

The plan, as mentioned elsewhere is to discuss the role of Management history and of story-telling in our classrooms and to explore questions of how and why we use these tools and what some of the standards for accuracy should be. We plan to use the re-mis-telling of Taylor's Pig Iron stories as a springboard for this discussion. With that context in mind, what follows is a list of questions we would like to use to guide discussion. Further notes are included, as necessary, to help explain the planned discussion.

- Do you tell stories about Scientific Management/Taylorism/Pig Iron in class?
- Which particular story do you tell? *[authors will discuss how they use the Pig Iron story in class]*
- Why do you tell the story?
 - learning objective? *[discuss value of history and stories in teaching and learning]*
 - entertainment value? *[discuss the importance of entertainment value in stories]*
- Are you aware that the Pig Iron tale's accuracy is seriously in doubt? *[point out some of the ways the story has been questioned]*
- Does or would that knowledge impact your telling of the story?
 - why or why not?
 - how does/will it impact your telling?
- How important is it that historical stories be accurate? *[draw from philosophy of history here]*
- What's important in a story? *[draw from pedagogical value of story-telling here]*
- What's important about history *[draw from pedagogical value of history and philosophy of history here]*

10) For Activities and Exercises:

Attach any materials needed to run the activity and debriefing questions. Evidence for effectiveness may also be included.

Not applicable

11) Implications for Teaching or for Teachers:

What is the contribution of your session?

Participants will *examine their reasons* for **telling stories and using lessons from history**, will *learn from others* about same and *learn what research and theory says* about same

Participants will learn of some of the **inaccuracies of Frederick Taylor's "Pig Iron Tales"**

Participants will **examine the impact of truth vs. "object lessons"** in the effectiveness of story-telling

We hope such introspection and lessons will carry over to other stories and historical lessons participants use in their classes -- that it may inspire new, modified, or even discontinued use of certain stories and lessons.

12) References and/or Additional Materials:

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