

Why the UK's business schools and accounting academics...

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I have been in debate [on another post with a UK accounting academic](#). I admit that the debate would not make an edifying read. I have found the commentators' observations irritating, to say the least. I explained why in a comment I have made on that post this morning but at the same time I have also responded to his suggestion that I should spend my time writing for academic journals. He suggested this because he believes that this would, rather bizarrely, prove my credibility even though I recall reading a while ago that the average UK academic journal paper was read by just six people, and that included the editor, the author and the peer reviewers. Having reflected on this issue I added the following comment, which I think worth sharing more widely (and I've edited it a little here):

At the core of your latest comment is an absolutely fundamental error of judgement, and that is that academic accounting has had anything whatsoever to offer to British society for many a long year. As a consequence you think that I should somehow seek academic approval for what I do, and that this would give it greater status. Why on earth would I want to do that? With the notable, and singular, exception of Prem Sikka academic accounting's track record over the last thirty or more years has been dire, and that is probably being kind to it.

Can you suggest one innovation in accounting that originated in the U.K.'s academic accounting network in that period? Can you name one accountant who was framed public debate in any way, apart from Prem? Is there an academic accountant who is in any way contributed to tax debate, apart from saying cutting it might be a benefit, without reason given?

Imagine what would have happened if I had submitted my work for peer review of the sort you suggest. Would country by country reporting exist? Would it now be on the agenda of the European Union, International Accounting Standards Board, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and others? Of course it wouldn't. Peer review would have prevented me publishing a paper on the subject. Academic accounting is about quoting from existing ideas, not developing new ones. That is the poverty of intellectual thought in the UK, exemplified in a discipline

like accountancy that has no history of original thinking.

Would the debate on the tax gap, now prevalent in politics, have survived peer review? I very much doubt it. Methodology would have been torn apart forever, but the reality is that because I wrote about the tax gap for the TUC the government was forced to address the issue, whether it liked it or not. We still disagree about methodology, but the debate was created. That did not happen as a consequence of academic accounting.

And what about tax havens? Is the fundamental distortion of markets that they create an issue at your business school? Is the opacity that hiding accounts from public view that they encourage highlighted as an economic distortion? Is the opacity within consolidated accounts that ensures that large corporations can shift their profits without being subject to public scrutiny treated as a fundamental failure of our existing accounting framework within your department? Are academic accountants everywhere jumping up and down saying tax havens must be abolished to ensure that effective markets operate on behalf of all participants, large and small, and whether they're in business or its stakeholders? If not, why not? What corruption has led to this absolutely absurd position where you teach that markets are the solution to all problems and yet fail to highlight any of the abuses of markets that are promoted to ensure that the ordinary people of the world are exploited?

I will tell you what it is that ensures that these issues aren't raised. Firstly it is the appointments process. If you disagree with the system, then you won't get a job. If you do not buy into the absolutely fundamental (and absurd) underlying assumptions of neoliberal economics, even if you are an accountant, then you have absolutely no prospect of a career in a UK university business school or academic accounting department. Second, peer review ensures that this is the case. You must quote the opinions of those in authority, and approve them. If you do not your papers are not published. If you do not publish your career does not progress. The system has been set up to ensure that is the case. The neoliberal hegemony is enforced. Third, funding ensures that this is the case: far too many departments are dependent upon raising money from business or large firms of accountants. Their independence is, as a consequence, fundamentally threatened. Fourthly, and essentially, business wants to make sure that this is the case. It suits them very well have people like you placed in academic departments to suggest that people like me, who question the system, aren't up to the task of preparing an academic paper. How convenient it is to question my credibility. But they, and you, miss the whole point. I'm not choosing to play that game. I'm questioning the whole system, and the UK's business schools, in particular, exist for one reason and one reason only and that is to reinforce the neoliberal dogma which is destroying the capacity of UK business to think about anything but short-term trading. That is in turn destroying both our society, and by the destruction of the environment, the world at large.

I am, of course, open to comments but if they do not pass my peer review process they

won't be published.