

REPLY

PRESCRIPTIONS ARE NOT ENOUGH

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According to Bazerman, economics has achieved its position of dominance simply because it provides prescriptions whereas other social sciences do not. We challenge his argument by showing that other social sciences do offer prescriptive advice but are nonetheless rarely influential. We argue that the mechanisms through which economics and other social sciences gain influence and affect practice should be investigated more carefully by management scholars seeking to understand how to have greater impact on both public policy and management practice.

Bazerman's (2005) comment on our article (Ferraro, Pfeffer, & Sutton, 2005), although insightful and offering many ideas and sentiments with which we agree, is only tangentially related to what our article is about. Bazerman believes that we both ask the wrong question and provide the wrong answer. The right question seems to be why does economics have such dominance, even though "it has been falsified" (Bazerman, 2005: 25)? The right answer, according to Bazerman, is for researchers in the other social sciences to lose their academic inhibitions and become more prescriptive, and he offers behavioral decision theory as an exemplar of a social science that both demonstrates the errors of economics and highlights how the social sciences can become more influential.

We agree completely that other social sciences would benefit from being more involved in the policy arena in many different ways, that prescription based on sound evidence is a good thing, and that at least some scholars or some portions of various social sciences have done things that have limited the influence of their work, including using unnecessarily abstruse jargon. We would not quarrel with the important research contributions made by behavioral decision theorists, but would note that being asked to testify is not quite the same as actually influencing policy. In fact, committees often call people they have no intention of listening to as a way of demonstrating that they are comprehen-

sive, fair, and have considered all points of view. However, assessing the impact of behavioral decision theory, other social sciences, or economics on various public policies or organizational arrangements is an extensive empirical task—well beyond the scope of this reply. Instead, what we seek to do in the brief amount of space we have is to challenge Bazerman's assertion that the problem is not enough prescription by social sciences other than economics and offer some different insight into how and why social sciences come to have influence.

THERE ARE PLENTY OF PRESCRIPTIONS

Bazerman's assertion that other social sciences are, with the possible exception of behavioral decision theory, not prescriptive and not sufficiently engaged in trying to shape organizational or public policy is not only patently untrue but does a disservice to and shows disrespect for the literally thousands of studies and hundreds of scholars in such fields as organizational behavior, sociology, psychology, and political science who have toiled mightily to both develop knowledge and advocate the use of that knowledge in specific arenas of policy and practice. There are way too many arenas and scholars to mention in this reply, or even in a single book, but for just a tiny and necessarily idiosyncratic sample of areas in which scholars in fields other than economics have made pre-

scriptions—that have frequently been ignored—consider the following: high-commitment or high-road employment practices and their implementation (e.g., Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000; Appelbaum & Batt, 1994); the futility of much downsizing and how to do downsizing with fewer adverse consequences (e.g., Cascio, 2002); the evaluation and design of income maintenance programs, including proposals for reforming welfare (e.g., Blank, 1989; Clark-Kauffman, Duncan, & Morris, 2003; Greenberg & Mandell, 1991; Munnell, 1987); school-to-work transitions and how to make them more effective (Ryan, 2001); designing more effective learning environments and educational practices, including examining the adverse consequences of zero-sum competitions and grading on the learning process (e.g., Deutsch, 1979, Johnson & Johnson, 1991); the beneficial effects of and how to design family-friendly workplaces (e.g., Konrad & Mangel, 2000; Mayers, 2003); the remediation of crime and criminal behavior (Sherman & Strang, 2004; Vaughan, 2002); and how to select employees who fit the organization's culture and therefore are more likely to remain and be successful (e.g., Chatman, 1991; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991).

This is but a small, quite partial, and completely inadequate list. After all, industrial and organizational psychology began almost 100 years ago with an emphasis on prescription—how to select the right people for various jobs, how to develop and train them, and, subsequently, what effective leader behavior was. Educational psychology and learning theorists were and are interested in how people learn and in how to develop more effective teaching strategies and better learning environments. The idea that economics has a self-generated monopoly on prescription is simply not true.

What is true is that evidence and policy recommendations that are inconsistent with the ideological and methodological foundations of economics receive short shrift. Consider the case of social promotion—the practice of advancing a child to the next grade, even if his or her work is not up to par. Social promotion was ended in Chicago in 1996, at Mayor Daley's urging; in New York in 1999, at Mayor Giuliani's insistence; and in numerous other cities, including Baltimore and Philadelphia. Ending social promotion is part and parcel of an ideology of individual accountability that argues that indi-

vidual students should be accountable for their learning and should be held back if they fail. It is very much part of the idea, certainly prevalent in economics but elsewhere also, that individuals make choices (albeit sometimes constrained or cognitively biased choices), including decisions about how much effort to exert and, therefore, what their performance will be. These decisions and their resulting outcomes need to have consequences, and adverse consequences at that, if the choices create bad outcomes.

On the surface, it seems hard to argue with former President Clinton's assertion, in his 1999 State of the Union address, that "When we promote a child from grade to grade who hasn't mastered the work, we do the child no favors." But at least fifty-four studies show that when flunked students are compared to socially promoted students, flunked students subsequently perform worse and drop out of school at higher rates (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). Social promotion also leaves schools crowded with older students and increases costs, since more teachers and other resources are required because students spend more years in school. There were plenty of prescriptions to not adopt this flawed policy. Noted educational researcher Robert Hauser warned:

We should know that a new policy works before trying it out on a large scale. In its plan to end social promotion the administration appears to have [included] . . . an enforcement provision—flunking kids by the carload lot—about which the great mass of evidence is strongly negative. And this policy will hurt poor and minority children most of all (1999: 65).

By the way, Hauser's predictions came true. New York, which eliminated social promotion in 1999, reinstated it in 2002 because the number of children held back grew to 43,000 and would reach 100,000 by 2004—numbers that the school system simply could not afford (McCarthy, 2002). What this story—and the many other similar examples we could muster—illustrates is that there is plenty of prescription, based on lots of sound evidence, that is ignored when it is inconsistent with dominant ideological and theoretical world views. The problem is not an absence of prescription but a failure to understand how and why theories and ideologies achieve and maintain dominant positions. In this regard, theories' ability to become self-fulfilling, to become true by construction, is almost certainly a part of

the answer. But it is, we freely admit, just one part of the explanation.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

Understanding the evolution and influence of social science and policy making is a large task, beyond the scope of this reply. Such an endeavor, however, would obviously bring interests and power into the picture and would investigate the coevolution of power in the social sciences and in society at large. Social science clearly does not develop in a political vacuum, and it is not independent of the practical problems a society and its elites confront.

The evolution of economics itself over the past seventy years provides evidence that the interaction between ideas and theories and the broader political and social environment is critical in explaining the rise and fall of theories, and it is likely that the same process applies to the competition among the social sciences. It is easy to forget that little more than fifty years ago, most economies were so-called mixed economies governed by a combination of market forces and various regulations and government intervention (Kuttner, 1999). The domination of a libertarian view of government, markets, and regulation, both in public policy and in a number of social sciences, is a relatively recent occurrence. "In the 1950s, Milton Friedman was dismissed as a curiosity. By the 1980s, Friedman and several of his followers had won the Nobel Prize" (Kuttner, 1999: 33).

The Chicago counterrevolution against Keynesianism, spearheaded by Milton Friedman's (1959) work on monetary policy, concluded that the best intervention in the economy was no intervention at all. As economics has become increasingly libertarian in tone in the United States—economists arguing for limiting government as far as possible and dismantling the different institutions that had effectively regulated market forces since the Great Depression (Blyth, 2002)—other social sciences, such as political science, with its emphasis on rational choice (Green & Shapiro, 1994), and sociology (Coleman, 1990), have followed.

The concept that ideas follow money, power, and influence is scarcely novel or surprising. As documented by a number of people, including Kuttner (1999) and Blyth (2002), the natural evo-

lution of theoretical ideas was "helped" along with resources. The Heritage Foundation, founded in 1973, had an annual budget of \$7.1 million by 1980. The Hoover Institution at Stanford received about \$4.9 million between 1979 and 1982 from the Smith Richardson, the Scaife, and the Olin foundations—three of the most active conservative foundations. The American Enterprise Institute was reinvigorated during the 1970s, its budget growing from less than 1 million to \$10.4 million, with a large amount of the funds coming from the same three foundations. Since 1985, the National Bureau of Economic Research has received close to \$10 million from conservative foundations.

Comparative work on the spread of similar ideas across different countries suggests that the specific mechanisms, and obviously the details, of influence might vary across polities. But the evidence all suggests that the rise to power of economics, and, moreover, of a particular theoretical brand of economics, was not independent of the political contests and the institutions of each country (Dezalay & Garth, 2002; Fourcade-Gourinchas & Babb, 2002).

Bazerman seems to suggest that the structure of social science research, and its relation with society, does not really matter and is not worthy of study and that we just need to provide sound, evidence-based policy advice and people will pay attention. He basically tells us to "stop whining and get back to work." We argue that being unconcerned about the condition and the causal factors influencing social science research in the United States and globally, and the embeddedness of ideas in a set of interests and values, will actually not help us become more influential. Understanding the structure, evolution, and, yes, even the self-reinforcing aspects of social theory, however, can help us collectively devise effective strategies of theory development, diffusion, and influence on both public policy and organizational practices.

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