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Abstract

This dissertation forum continues the tradition started last year by *Business & Society* to recognize and recognize the achievements of the finalists of the Academy of Management's Social Issues in Management (SIM) Division dissertation award. The dissertation forum includes an introductory essay by the chair of the committee. The essay details the procedure behind choosing a winner as well as reflection on the process. The special dissertation forum also includes the three dissertation abstracts by the finalists. The forum includes a description of each of the finalists as well as a critical evaluation of the works. Similar to last year, each finalist was also asked to provide some insights into “for producing exemplary dissertation research.” These insights are also documented at the end of each abstract.

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Chairing a dissertation competition is exciting. No matter what division the competition is open to, chairing the session would enable someone to get an in-depth look at what future experts in the field are toying with. It is with this thought that I accepted the role of chairperson of the 2011 Academy of Management Social Issues in Management (SIM) Division Dissertation award. As I reflect on the experience, I realize that I have not been disappointed.

This special dissertation forum is the second of its kind. Duane Windsor, editor at *Business & Society* again agreed to publish the abstracts of the top three finalists for the dissertation award. Furthermore, the insights these finalists have with regard to successful completion of their respective dissertations were also sought. This dissertation forum thus continues the example set by Jim Mattingly in penning the inaugural essay (Mattingly, 2011).

The Submissions

I was involved with the Social Issues in Management dissertation award as a committee member for more than 3 years. Assuming the role of chair was therefore not difficult. Working with the able executives of the division, a call was sent to the SIM membership and a number of other related organizations to advertise the award. The award call basically indicated that 10-page abstracts of dissertation related to SIM would need to be submitted by the end of April 2011.

A large number of entries were received, and an examination of the very areas to which the dissertations pertained was very illuminating. For example, none of the dissertations dealt with basic individual ethics or other understanding of why individuals are unethical. Instead, most of the submissions dealt with wider SIM areas. Among those abstracts submitted that were not nominated as finalists were dissertations dealing with topics such as how organizations can integrate corporate social responsibility (CSR) with their strategy and operations. Another dissertation applied the sociocultural theories to better understand risk in organizations. If dissertations represent where the field is going, I have to admit that the future of SIM looks very bright.

A look at the nationality of the dissertation nominees also reveals the global nature of the SIM division. Submissions are no longer dominated by U.S. or North American universities. In fact, 29% of submissions were from

U.S. universities. Another 29% came from Canadian universities. The rest (and most) of the submissions came from Europe (42%). Although it is encouraging to see that most of the submissions are now coming from outside of the United States, I think it is important for the SIM division to make a greater effort to encourage submissions from Asian and other universities in regions not represented by the above.

The Process

As was the case in previous years, the Dissertation Award Competition began in February, on publication of the annual competition's announcement. The announcement indicated that 10-page abstracts would be due by the end of April. Eligibility requirements, according to the Academy of Management's policies, included the following: (a) The dissertation must have been defended between March 1, 2009 and March 31, 2011; (b) It must have been written in the English language; (c) It must focus on some aspect of the relationship between business and society (broadly construed); and (d) It must not be submitted to any other AOM division in the same year.

In selecting members for the committee, I wanted broad representation that would bring a diversity of perspectives on the judging process. The committee thus included four other members: (a) Dr. John Cullen, a noted expert on ethical climates, a professor of strategy at Amsterdam Business School, (b) Dr. Martin Hoegl, a chaired professor of Human Resource Management at WHU—Otto Beisheim School of Management (WHU, Vallendar), Germany, (c) Dr. Daeil Nam, an assistant professor at Korea University, and (d) Dr. Adele Santana, an assistant professor at the University of Northern Iowa, and most important, a previous winner of the SIM Dissertation award. The committee thus included individuals at various stages of their careers with strong expertise in SIM issues and very qualified to judge the nominations.

After checking eligibility requirements of the submissions, the committee reviewed the abstracts and rated them according to the following criteria, which were published in the announcement.

- *Domain relevance:* The research topic is applicable to the domain statement of the SIM Division of the Academy of Management. The motivation for the research problem is clearly established.
- *Presentation style:* The writing is clear, reasoning is sound, each part clearly contributes toward a coherent thesis, and passive language is

avoided. The manuscript's length is commensurate with the scope of the project.

- *Literature review*: The literature reviewed provides an appropriate and thorough context for understanding current knowledge surrounding the research problem. The length of the literature review is appropriately matched to the methodological strategy employed.
- *Conceptual development*: The constructs being examined are clearly identified and defined, and relationships among them are clearly and thoroughly explained. Potentially confounding constructs are not ignored but are clearly identified and their potential effects are adequately considered. Hypotheses deduced, or propositions induced, are clearly and thoroughly established from the literature or research results presented, respectively.
- *Methodological appropriateness*: The methodological tradition followed is well matched to the research problem and the scholarly context established in the literature review. The procedures followed to collect and analyze data are rigorous, appropriately considering dual goals of validity and reliability.
- *Significance of contribution*: The conclusions drawn are interesting, important, and timely, producing a significant contribution to the study and practice of management. Conclusions logically follow from the arguments developed and the data presented.

When I gave instructions to the judges, I also requested that they provide a list of their top three nominees. After receiving the scores and the rankings, I was surprised at the degree of convergence regarding the top three finalists. The committee deliberated to tackle any disagreements and a consensus soon emerged regarding the three finalists.

After consensus was reached regarding the three finalists, I contacted each finalist to request their full dissertation. We then spent some time in May to review the full dissertations. While there was some disagreement on which candidate should be the winner, we deliberated over several days until consensus emerged regarding the winner.

The three finalists presented their dissertations at the SIM Best Dissertation Finalists session on Sunday, August 14, 2011. The session was well attended, and the presenters presented in alphabetical order. The first presenter was Darline Augustine, and she received her PhD from the London School of Economics. Her dissertation examined performance in the microfinance industry and whether good corporate governance resulted in better performance. To examine the question, Augustine differentiated between social

and commercial companies in the microfinance industry. Augustine assumed the different contexts that these two types of companies exist in may present different paths to performance.

The major strengths of Augustine's dissertation are the empirical settings as well as the mixture of qualitative and quantitative data collected. Augustine collected data from the Grameen bank (Bangladesh), Jami Bora (India), and SKS (Kenya) through informal and formal communications with the founders of the three microfinance companies as well as secondary data from published sources. All three companies are well known for their microfinance work in their respective countries. Augustine also collected data from the microfinance industry in China to glean the effect of public policy on microfinance organizations in China. Augustine recounted the difficulties of collecting such data within the Chinese context.

Results provided support for most of the original assertions of the dissertation. The overwhelming finding was that company transparency, as an indicator of good corporate governance, had a positive impact on organizational performance. Such results are similar whether the company is a social or commercial microfinance provider. Furthermore, the study of the Chinese context revealed that public policy can also have significant impact on performance. Overall, the articles that will likely be published from this dissertation will provide enhanced understanding of the benefits of strong corporate governance on organizational performance in an otherwise neglected setting, namely, the microfinance industry. Furthermore, the empirical setting of the study also provides important understanding of the link between corporate governance and performance in a global setting. Such findings support the notion that corporate governance is critical in all countries.

The second presenter was Joel Marcus, a PhD holder from the Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada. Marcus's dissertation proposes a cross-level look at how values influence the propensity of companies, through the collective actions of its employees, to either support (strength actions) or harm society (concern actions) by either being supportive or rejecting sustainability actions. A major strength of the dissertation is the acceptance of the view that companies do not operate in a vacuum but rather operate in ways connected to both society and the individuals that comprise the organization. This acceptance of the cross-level relationships among the individual actors that form part of the organization, the organization itself, and society provides for a very refined understanding of support or rejection of sustainability.

Using a broad sample of students, Marcus shows that there are six dimensions of corporate actions propensity. This finding represents a significant contribution to the literature as there was confusion regarding how to assess

support for sustainability in the literature previously. Marcus also assessed economic, social and environmental values. Overwhelmingly, Marcus finds that those who hold economic values are less likely to show support for sustainability. However, Marcus also finds that the economic and social values are clearly distinct and show differential support for economic or socially directed actions. Marcus's findings are also notable in that there is significant gender effects on the relationships noted. Being female was a significant negative predictor of concern actions.

Overall, Marcus's dissertation provides a strong cross-level examination of support or rejection of sustainability. Given the importance of the area within the context of climate change, the dissertation has important implications for future sustainability research. However, it does also present important policy alternatives.

The third and final presenter was Judith Schrempf, and she completed her PhD at the Université de Lausanne, Switzerland. Schrempf's dissertation also addressed a broader SIM issue. Specifically, she examined the case of companies getting blamed for actions even though these companies were not directly linked to such actions. For instance, a U.S. judge recently allowed suing of several multinationals because their business operations facilitated human rights violation during apartheid in South Africa. Schrempf argues that the traditional liability view of CSR based on a legal mind-set cannot explain such indirect links between actions and companies. Such traditional views of CSR can only explain more direct links between company actions and consequences.

Given the limitations of the traditional liability CSR approach, Schrempf proposes a novel approach to understanding responsibility of corporations. Specifically, Schrempf proposes a social connection approach to CSR whereby connections between actors determine the responsibility of these actors in terms of actions producing harm. This novel approach to CSR thus provides some understanding of how corporations' responsibility can be attributed to specific actions even though they may not have necessarily caused such actions directly.

Schrempf also considers both upstream and downstream CSR to provide a more nuanced understanding of the social connection approach. First, upstream activities along the value chain are analyzed. To understand the social connection approach, Schrempf studies NGOs in nine different industries. Analysis of NGO demands over the last decades reveals what types of demands are being placed today on multinationals. Schrempf also analyses downstream CSR by examining the current debate regarding obesity. In the latter case, Schrempf uses a social connection approach to show how

understanding obesity is different from understanding product liability in cases where products cause harm to the users. Although the traditional liability view is useful in case of product liability cases, such as the Ford Pinto or the Tylenol cases, products being sold by fast food companies and their impact on the obesity crisis can only be understood through the lens of the new CSR social connection approach.

Similar to the other two dissertations, Schrempf's scholarship is novel, exciting, and tackling a very contemporary broad SIM issue. The articles that will eventually appear from her dissertation will likely change the way we think about CSR. Rather than the more legal view bound by organizational contexts, Schrempf's view of CSR is much broader and accommodates the influence of society as well as political processes.

The evaluation of all three dissertations showed that these SIM members are doing excellent work. For example, in evaluating the dissertation in terms of the interest generated by the effort (Davis, 1971), there is no doubt that all three authors are tackling key issues that have important implications for how future research will be shaped. All three dissertations tackle very broad SIM issues where the ethics of the individual is not examined in isolation. Instead, all three dissertations proposed cross-level models integrating the many influences on the variables they are studying. Such approaches also heed calls by Hitt, Beamish, Jackson, and Mathieu (2007, p. 1385) as focusing on single levels of analysis "yields an incomplete understanding of behaviors occurring at either level."

It is also important to note that these three dissertations were tested in intriguing empirical settings. No longer are such dissertations limited to surveys. For instance, Schrempf analyzed historical data to examine how corporations assisted the Nazis by engaging in business activities with the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945. In doing so, she proposed a historic look at the responsibility of corporations for their prior actions on current behaviors. Similarly, Augustine used a hybrid qualitative/quantitative approach to interview the founders of some of the world's most well-known microfinance companies.

Finally, it is also critical to note that all three dissertations had a rigorous theoretical framework. In examining these dissertations along the suggestions of both Whetten (1989) and Sutton and Staw (1995), it was refreshing to see that many of the key suggestions of good and strong theory were followed. For instance, in examining each dissertation in terms of "What's new?" "So what?" "Why so?" "Well done?" "Done well?" "Why now?" and "Who cares?" (Whetten, 1989), it is obvious that all of these questions can be answered in the affirmative. The dissertations all tackled new and very

relevant areas. The studies were all carried very well and have the potential to make significant contributions to the literature.

In the end, we had to choose a winner. The committee choose Darline Augustine and she was presented with the plaque at the end of the event. It was a tough decision to choose a winner among the three finalists, but the committee felt that her dissertation was the best among the nominations for the 2011 SIM Dissertation Award.

During the presentations, I also asked the three finalists to provide “insights for producing exemplary dissertation research.” These comments are also provided at the end of each dissertation abstract in this issue. We hope that these insights will be useful as current doctoral students consider dissertation topics. They do have big shoes to fill.

Conclusion

As I mentioned at the outset, I anticipated chairing the SIM dissertation award with great excitement. I was not disappointed. The task took lots of time during the critical and busy end of semester period. However, I learned a lot about what the future of SIM research looks like. I had the chance to interact with the finalists and have no doubt that learning about their work will affect my own work. I also had a chance to interact with the members of the committee in different ways before, and it was heartening to see that I could rely on these individuals. I encourage everyone to be part of the committee and to chair the committee at some point. It’s well worth your time!

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Bio

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