

Insight-based Critical Realism

A Trans-cultural Epistemology for a European Higher Education Area

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Presenter Symposium

CURRICULUM AT THE INTERFACE: THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION

AREA AND COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL

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Potential Sponsor Divisions: Management Education and Development, International Management, and the Social Issues in Management Divisions.

The Symposium organizers, Mette Zølner and Charles T. Tackney, have received the statements from all intended participants agreeing to participate in the entire Symposium and stating that they are not in violation of the Rule of Three + Three.

(We request consideration for MED Best Symposium in Management Education and Development Award.)

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1. Teaching the EU using plurilingual content based teaching and cooperative learning

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2. At the interface of disciplines: Interdisciplinarity as a driver of curriculum innovation

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3. Rigor AND relevance: Challenges of Master thesis writing at the Copenhagen Business School

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4. Institutional Entrepreneurs and Curriculum Innovation

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5. Insight-based critical realism: a Trans-cultural Epistemology for a European Higher Education Area

Charles T. Tackney, Ph.D.

6. Teaching in foreign languages at the interface of business disciplines

Mette Zølner, Ph.D.

**Insight-based critical realism: A Trans-cultural Epistemology for the European Higher
Education Area Interface**

Charles T. Tackney

My goal in this Symposium presentation and paper is to explore the Europeanization of higher education and report on curriculum deployment of Lonergan's epistemology and method in management and organizational studies (B. J. F. Lonergan, 1971; B. Lonergan, 1998; B. Lonergan, 1999; B. Lonergan, 2005). Two points need initial elaboration: the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the content of the interdisciplinary research methods framework that has been developed and deployed.

First, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was established under the 1999 Bologna Process, which is "an autonomous intergovernmental arrangement, based on a common policy document (known as the *Bologna Declaration*) to which European countries may become parties and in which the European Union plays a role" (Reinalda & Kulesza, 2005). Signed in 1991 by ministers of education from 29 nations, including Denmark, there are now 47 participating nations. Their most recent report is the 2015 Yerevan Communiqué (EHEA Ministerial Conference, May 14-15, 2015). The Bologna Process depends entirely on autonomous and independent higher education institutional cooperation for success. These autonomous actors are the diverse epistemic communities throughout the EU university and institutional arena. Within this model, an *epistemic community* is defined as "a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area" (Haas, 1992).

Although the management of knowledge, its epistemological characteristics and its embodiment in curriculum, are primary concerns, Bologna is a very curious process. It lacks

legal sanctions but packs plenty of implicit coercion. The Declaration explains, “Any pressure individual countries and higher education institutions may feel from the Bologna process could only result from their ignoring increasingly common features or staying outside the mainstream of change” (Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European Universities, 2000). The Declaration website states, “Universities and other institutions of higher education can choose to be actors, rather than objects, of this essential process of change.” Thus, a pattern of emergent probabilities appears to characterize the Bologna Process and its momentum, dependent as they are on the many EU university actors’ willingness to make EHEA a reality.

Specification of the *necessary European dimensions of higher education* is an explicit goal of this Process, from the first Declaration to the most recent 2012 Bucharest Communiqué. Specifying European dimensions is also a curious element in the Process and EHEA. In some manner, shape, or form local curriculum decisions regarding content are patterned after pan-EHEA templates or knowledge-sharing deemed suitable across a vast, unprecedented array of culture, language, and nation. Interdisciplinary methods are critically important for including for the appropriate design of interdisciplinary research methods for management and organizational studies in all countries of the EHEA. As remarkable as this may sound, the last effort at educational reform on such a scale of institutional organization and content seems to be the 1599 Ratio Studiorum developed and diffused throughout Jesuit universities (Society of Jesus, 1599).

Interdisciplinary research methods, specifically the epistemological manner of grounding, reconciling, and introducing cultural complexities to students, is a central matter in this Process and Area. The author has detailed in academic conference and journal publications a history of academic committee decisions and classroom tools about an epistemological framework for

interdisciplinary research methods at undergraduate and graduate levels at the Copenhagen Business School (CBS), which have been deployed in teaching opportunities in the EU and beyond.

Over the past decade and more, the insight-based critical realism approach to epistemology developed by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, along with reference to his concept of a general empirical method, has been an organizing basis for a range of undergraduate, Master's, and doctoral level courses. Relating this effort is the focus of this Symposium presentation and supporting paper. My reason for doing so is that *insight-based critical realism* has been largely received by educational administrators, teaching colleagues, and students with evident signs of relief, as the basic Transcendental Precepts – to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible – clearly and firmly situate ultimate responsibility for education in the students' own sense of self in a challenging, optimistic study atmosphere (C. Tackney T., Sato, & Stromgren, 2010; C. Tackney T., Sato, & Stromgren, 2013; C. Tackney T. & Gwozdz, 2014).

Insight-based critical realism and the associated general empirical method help students to first grasp the nature of insight by reflection on its intrinsic, personal properties. This aids awareness of and directly links to sound empirical method; students are helped to grasp and empirically verify, through interesting class exercises, basic cognitional operations and gain an appreciation for this dynamic human capability. Students reflect on their own experience, recognize distinctions between questions for knowledge and deliberations of value. They come to recognize the complementarity between quantitative and qualitative research methods. They learn to challenge alleged causal relations by noting the statistical anomalies. The engaged researcher can shift seamlessly between these complementarities through the course of literature

review, the crafting of methods, collection of data and, of course, later discussion and examination (C. Tackney T. et al., 2013).

This approach appeals particularly to those undergraduates and graduate students who are facing a bewildering range of methods for their project and thesis work. Students can grasp the notion of “dramatic knowledge” to help them succeed when presenting their project synopsis in an oral examination. And doctoral students find their research competence, regardless of initial persuasion, strengthened in group statistics study by an appreciation of the complementarity between causal explanation and statistical analysis of what Lonergan usefully labelled the “empirical residue” (B. J. Lonergan F., 1992). Finally, Lonergan’s concept of emergent probability offers students a reasoned and reasonable platform to pursue interdisciplinary studies with a degree of confidence as participants in the very history they examine (Melchin, 1988).

Since 2001, Four study boards at CBS have sanctioned deployment of insight-based critical realism in curriculum design at undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral levels. Following Danish tradition, these boards had already elected student representatives for the “management of higher education.” Freed from the Bologna Process issue of initial configuration concerns, the CBS curriculum revision directly benefitted from the student representative support for instruction on an epistemology designed for citizenship in a multi-cultural, multi-national EU setting. To be clear, insight-based critical realism is never the core of any course it has been deployed in. Rather, it serves as an organizing tool for personal reflection on the conditions that matter for the possibility of authenticity in human endeavors: to be attentive, to be intelligent, to be reasonable, and to be responsible.

The European-level higher education goals of the Bologna Process, since 1999, focus considerable attention on the “externalities” of how advances in one country can be imitated in

another. Thus, a lot of energy has been devoted to higher education study program credit transfer, along with student and faculty mobility for exchange study experience throughout the EHEA. This Symposium presentation and paper looks to one key item in core curriculum content that such mobility both enables and obliges attention: the *necessary European dimensions*. This approach has been used with success in Master's and doctoral course work in a 2011 faculty exchange teaching opportunity at the International School for Business and Social Studies, Celje, Slovenia. In Ireland, David Coghlan has employed the thought of Lonergan in his work on organizational development and action research (Coghlan & Cagney, 2013; Coghlan & Shani, 2013). Recent research based on the trans-cultural foundations of cognition operations has been taken up to identify threshold criteria for authenticity in the workplace according to Roman Catholic and Sunni Islam social teachings (C. T. Tackney & Shah, 2015). At the moment, insight-based critical realism is being used in an internship project to aid evaluation of the appropriate sequencing of information and design presentation for consumers of information in a human rights advocacy website.

The necessary European dimensions of curriculum content for the EHEA remain a topic of both interest and concern – and this all the more in light of the recent Brexit vote in the United Kingdom. This Symposium offering seeks to enhance the dialogue concerning the role and function of epistemology in and for the future of the European Union. Across the striking range of cultures, languages, and nations comprising the EU, each and every citizen can help ensure Project success through attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsible action. The invariant patterns of our cognitional operations provide a way to work in common on behalf of EHEA progress. In simple terms, Lonergan's approach to epistemology may be a compelling

curriculum content item for the emerging EHEA research methods repertoire of the European social sciences.

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