



Unknowability and enabled wayfinding

Management Learning

1–22

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DOI: 10.1177/13505076251398524

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Abstract

Scholars are in the business of “knowing”; they conduct research to expand knowledge and meet society’s, practitioners’, or policymakers’ expectations through teaching and learning tools. Such actors expect scholars to contribute to the knowledge repository in management in the same way they would expect, for example, a chemist or civil engineer. However, can we meaningfully do so? Does the management field have the same knowability potential as that afforded by chemistry or engineering? I contend that it does not or at least not in the way that Aristotelian empiricism or Newtonian rationality imply. Instead, I argue for a lens of unknowability and call for a concomitant recalibration of management pedagogies through enabled wayfinding. With a more honest reflection on our knowability potential, enabled wayfinding introduces a bolder approach to teaching and learning that should trigger renewed optimism for the future state of our scholarly craft.

Keywords

Epistemology, ontology, philosophy of science, unknowability

Imagine how much harder physics would be if electrons had feelings!

—Richard Feynman (qtd. in Lo and Mueller, 2010)

The scholarly craft is “truth-tropic,” with “knowing” being the *raison d’être* for scholars’ professional existence (Lipton, 2004: 7; Bhaskar, 2013), a legacy of Aristotle and his dictum in *Metaphysics* that “everyone by nature desires to know” (Williamson, 2002). Yet, this inclination is rarely questioned by those who pursue it (see Zyphur and Pierides, 2017). Should attainment of truth be the scholarly aim? Is “knowing” attainable? To shed light, I join studies that problematize practices in business schools (Mavin et al., 2024; Pio and Merelo, 2023; Tourish, 2019)

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and do so via *unknowability*, that is, *the epistemic opacity that scholars and learners confront* in their attempt to know according to nomothetic doctrines. Non-knowledge of this sort seemingly opposes the scientific attitude. Yet, it is relevant for pedagogy, that is, as a means of transformative experience for learners.

Despite its link with pedagogy though, unknowability remains uncharted territory. This inattention can be attributed to the roots of business schools in the Anglo-Saxon world (see decolonial studies for viable alternatives; Abdallah, 2025; Barros and Alcadipani, 2023). Since inception, the purpose was to instill a culture of managerialism through formal education so that the new occupational class of managers could apply resultant knowledge; for this, business schools relied on logical empiricism (McLaren, 2020). Following postwar imperatives for restoration or industrial pressures for growth, problem-solving and proof became the core foci (see Ford and Carnegie reports; Statler, 2014). The overarching hope was that scientific rules, when “rubbed against” practice, would create professionals who can stand on par with doctors, lawyers, or engineers (Khurana, 2010; Simon, 1967: 13).

Then, management as a learned *techne* emulated science and privileged “the mathematical precision of fundamental concepts obtained by physicists” (Poulis and Kastanakis, 2020:678). A Newtonian ideal moved the field away from vocational training (which was seen as academically inferior), while the industry pressed for less “artful” engagement with practice and more “scientific theoretical language” (Cornelissen, 2023: 3; Khurana, 2010). This expectation is still the case with *evidence* being framed as key to closing the research–practice gap (Kepes et al., 2014). Then, this early scientization was coupled with an attempt by business schools to gain legitimacy—first, as autonomous departments in a contested terrain of higher education and, second, as fields of direct relevance for practice. This quest propelled nomothetic inquiry, bestowed authority and aligned management with fields of established status such as economics.

As soon as legitimacy was achieved, proximity with social sciences rejuvenated the field. A new stream of scholarship reoriented attention to under-theorized themes (e.g. values, ethics, identity, emancipation) via diverse modes of knowledge attainment (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Whitley, 1984). Critical inquiry gained internal legitimacy, and thus, in Kuhnian terms, the field evolved through paradigmatic shifts (Clegg et al., 2022). However, Kuhnian evolution is also about which paradigm prevails (Kuhn, 1970). Arguably, scientific rationality did with most business scholarship still relying on deductive reasoning and positivist knowing (Kepes et al., 2014).

Given this empiricism, rarely are limits to knowing that apply to our discipline considered. Yet “a realisation of inadequacy to anything approaching full and comprehensive understanding” (Zembylas, 2005: 142) is *ipso facto* what makes inquiry in social settings legitimately possible (Bhaskar, 2013). Without this realization, this possibility is diluted and seriously challenged for its scientific-ness. Yet, despite its currency for practice, unknowability is ignored (Allen, 2017; Hay, 2023). This is not unique to management. Rather, unknowability occupies a miniscule space in scholarship where “a sense of an unknown world never entered into curricula and pedagogical decision-making, *even if it could and should have done so*” (Barnett, 2012: 66; emphasis in original).

Hence, I revisit “knowing” as the bedrock of scholarship and offer another understanding for those interested in management arguing that practical rationality filled with unknowables should catch our explicit attention. Yet, a primordial urge for scientism prevents us from disenchanting ourselves from purported truths and the empty promises of rampant empiricism. I problematize this status and stress onto-epistemological concerns. I underline the paradoxical symbiosis between unknowability and evidential inflation and draw learning implications via enabled wayfinding. I conclude by discussing main points.

Unknowability and onto-epistemological concerns

Unknowability is a metaphysical issue. Thus, one must first elucidate onto-epistemological concerns. I begin by explaining how literature treats unknowability. Then, I describe the dominance of nomothetic reasoning in management scholarship, I discuss alternatives to embrace unknowability and promote a suggestion for scholarly practice.

Unknowability in literature

Examples of unknowability are found in metaphysics (e.g. on the essence of ‘things’; Mander, 2020), in realms that go beyond scientific proof (e.g. the future; Rescher, 2009) or within philosophy of the mind (e.g. how consciousness is developed; Humphrey, 2020). They are also found within fields and topics constrained by our sensory capacities and what lies beyond them but also in fields of evidence-laden reasoning. For example, quantum physics underscores the impossibility to know the position and state of small particles (Goldstein, 2020), whereas Euclidean geometry refrains from measuring coastlines; the latter are fractals, and their precise length is unknowable in the context of our geometrical convictions (Olszewski, 2002). Other examples include psychoanalysis, which denounces conclusive answers about notions of identity or what prevents suffering (Petrucelli, 2018) or phenomena linked with baffling states such as paradoxes (Fara, 2010).

Yet, some unknowables may simply be unknowns; namely, they reflect only a temporary challenge that may be overcome. Herein, the fundamental point is different, that is, we cannot fully access reality -not because we have not mastered epistemological tools well enough- but due to reality’s metaphysical inconclusiveness. Hence, unknowability is not a peripheral issue or a mere discursive marker but an unavoidable ontological impediment to deploying epistemological choices. Then, why is it expunged from the scientific canon? Its historical depth underlines that it cannot be as easily discarded.

In Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle notes: precision and accuracy in inquiry should be sought after only to the extent that the nature of the topic affords; otherwise, understanding is undermined. This is the early precursor to unknowability, which led to fine developments in philosophy of science (Bhaskar, 1983). Following paucity in the dark ages, it was picked up again in the Renaissance and reframed as *docta ignorantia* by Nicholas of Cusa; a gnosiological doctrine referring to learned ignorance (Fiamma, 2022). However, the Enlightenment’s spirit of optimism soon forced unknowability into oblivion. Namely, observability, quantification and proof prevailed and became the hegemonic principles that guide scientific thought; a still-prevalent thesis nowadays (Jessop, 2021).

In the modern era, references to unknowability are sporadic, for example, Barrow (1999) in astronomy; Scott (2020) in the Classics; and Poulis (2025) in sociology. This lacuna is exemplified in Richard Feynmann’s quote “shut up and calculate,” which stresses the meaninglessness of what is unverifiable. This mathematical formalism was promulgated by influential communities such as the Vienna Circle and led to expelling unknowability from the scientific canon as “gibberish” (Goldstein, 2024). Yet, the concept is elaborated in philosophical branches such as epistemology (Rescher, 2009), philosophy of education (Zembylas, 2005) or ethics (Levinas, 1985). The latter saw unknowability, not in epistemic terms, but as moral responsibility. Namely, unknowability does not imply an antagonistic relation out of which scholars must exit victorious via certitude. Rather, since “[f]acts can be known, but Others cannot” (Abunuwara, 1998: 147), scholars should *experience* others as they are. If we wrap them up as “variables” whose feelings, preferences, and thinking are objectified via questionnaires, then, we cannot truly experience them (Zembylas, 2005).

“Experiencing” accords with pragmatism or phenomenological traditions. Yet, it stands against the epitome of science, that is, the scientific attitude, which is based on separating subjects and objects. Hence, unknowables, as a non-scientific domain, were left to religion, philosophy or art for illumination (Lo and Mueller, 2010) whereas our optimism to know aligned with designs that confirm knowledge in valid and reliable terms (Jessop, 2021). Following verification, such designs create comfort zones that can be used as doubt-free springboards for subsequent inquiry. Hence, nomothetic knowing reigns supreme.

Nomothetic reasoning in management

Such knowability is privileged in management, too. Pressures for evidence-based solutions imply that management scholars abhor not knowing. So, unknowability is studied only indirectly, for example, as mystery (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007) or as a passing reference that implies constraints of formal science (Sarasvathy, 2008). This is not to blame management scholars; what cannot be known poses an epistemological challenge indeed. Yet, the issue with unknowability is that while its states are not verifiable (incongruent with nomothetic agendas), they are *experienced* by practitioners who encounter insoluble technological, political, cultural situations that afford no predictive truths. Yet, the theoretical tools we give them to “manage” are based on conclusiveness and reassurance. Given this paradox, can we approach scholarship in ways that embrace unknowability?

At first, it seems “no” due to a reasoning that takes precedence over other concerns. That is, nomothetic scholars base their rationale on an axiom: theorizing is the functional minimization of an eternal truth. Via the brevity of propositional grammar, they strive for hypotheses, which represent enduring relations between immovable entities labeled as variables. This view elevates a sense of knowing and privileges realist knowledge in the form of typified statements (e.g. the more/the higher). This modality of knowing rests on a metaphysical property, that is, a mind-independent reality comprised of a priori entities that fundamentally exist and causally interact (Abdallah, 2025; Blackman and Sadler-Smith, 2009). Exemplified in hypothetico-deductive designs as the “standard style of theorizing” (Cornelissen, 2023: 1), such commitments imply that knowledge can be reached via testing.

Then, nomothetic scholarship treats knowledge as a resource awaiting its discovery and full disclosure. In turn, several management fields remain stubbornly monolithic. That is, scholars resort to standard modes of inquiry to safeguard what already is (e.g. Humean causality) but rarely reflect on what cannot be (e.g. statistical significance; McShane et al., 2019) or what must be undone (e.g. militant attachment to positivism; Poulis and Kastanakis, 2020). Thus, nomothetic reasoning is cemented as an anchor point of management inquiry with produced knowledge being the result of codification, statistical aggregates, and corresponding techniques (Billsberry et al., 2019; Cruickshank, 2010). However, this palatable reductionism does not recognize the phenomenological quality of management knowledge. The latter is not “there” but is reconstructed each time we deploy our variables, parameter estimates, laws, or regressions (Rhodes, 2009; Zyphur and Pierides, 2017). We may frame knowledge as a standing monolith but truth “*is not*” but rather “*happens*.” In turn, we treat this knowledge as an eternal regularity, not as empirical tendency; as generalizable dictum, not as probabilistic variance; as prediction, not as reasonable feasibility. In a nutshell, the dominant paradigm is couched in an unfounded confidence: We *can know*, with variables masquerading as reflections of an objective truth.

This overconfidence accords with the pursuit of excellence that popular books instilled (see Collins, 2024) and enabled by established logics in education (see Giroux, 2010). Due to this legacy, educators seek product-like answers for students’ consumption, and managers seek solutions

for direct use. But such epistemic assistance is a conjecture. Practical learning goes beyond edulcorated answers with formal knowledge only aiding managers *cope* with the indeterminate worlds they inhabit and shape. Knowledge is not negated since we remain interested in “things” that may help us understand. Yet, to comprehend “things,” we must see scholarly activity in non-essentialist terms. If we are trapped in nomothetic doctrines, we portray the world as stable and idiographic instances as trivial ruptures. Hence, instead of valuing *knowing* as an incomplete effort, we frame nomothetic knowledge as a triumphant accomplishment that is shelved as done.

The alternative and its relationship with other traditions

Unknowability is the alternative that disturbs an instrumental and directive view of scholarship and education. This nomothetic view is predicated on the possibility to know and the prospect of using this knowledge as a product for immediate action (Biesta, 2009). A manifestation is our fixation with AI tools for knowing purposes. AI-oriented education promises to solve problems or write new PhDs and journal papers for us. But, while the AI/knowing link may facilitate instrumental aims such as efficiency, who will sensitize and elate us in relation to pressing challenges? How will we reflect on what remains unknowable and beyond assumptions of a reality made of fixed entities that causally interact? Or else, can “things” be treated as a factuality that ignores indeterminacy and temporality? Can we overlook our epistemic vulnerability (Gilson, 2011)?

The answer is no, as reality is “irreducibly durative” and entails an ephemerality that reconfigures phenomena on the go (Bruner, 1991: 6). As such, we must cope with its perpetual flux. After all, this is congruent with practitioners’ experiences. The latter do not rely only on encoded protocols and rules to act; they also employ intuition, values, and emotions on the spot. Then, scholars must employ diverse ways of knowing, too, especially those that foster reflexivity and sensibility about the duality of (un)knowability advocated herein. Practical coping calls for pluralistic epistemologies in a meta-theoretical sense, that is, interpreting findings so that practitioners can exercise judgment. Thus, in the spirit of pluralism, findings, evidence, and facts are not discarded. However, while management phenomena can become more intelligible, they cannot be known in naturalistic terms.

Calls for pluralism exist (e.g. phenomenological, process, pragmatism traditions). So, several remarks herein are not unique to the unknowability thesis. Yet, they assume an added qualification or resonance, which differentiates unknowability from other studies. Namely, such traditions denounce nomothetic strictures and challenge positivist doctrines. Yet, they often frame their own findings in knowing terms. For example, pragmatism sees findings as *settled outcomes* that enable practitioners to act (see Martela, 2015). Similarly, process studies oppose the entitative paradigm and question positivist thinking. But they are still congruent with a knowability thesis. Process authors routinely “arrest” aspects of becoming and present them as *stocks of knowledge* that can be put to use (de Vaujany and Introna, 2024). This spatialization of knowledge opposes notions of ephemerality or indeterminacy and overlooks that “becomings” engender more than a mere itemization of reality (e.g. see the role of forgetting, omissions, ruptures; Poulis, 2025; Scott, 2018).

Moreover, management authors often draw upon philosophers to question conventional thinking. Yet, Pierce, a celebrated pragmatist, faithfully defended the scientific project and was adamant that truth will be eventually found at the end of scientific inquiry (Martela, 2015). Similarly, Lacan is used to introduce a psychoanalytic lens in management, especially linked to notions of language and the self (Contu et al., 2010). However, he enthusiastically advocated that “mathematical formalization is our goal, our ideal” (Lacan, 1975: 119).¹ Then, even in traditions of staunch polemic against conventional wisdom, we witness an enduring flirtation with the scientific attitude. At the same time, unknowability is neither a focal nor an explicit concern therein.

Therefore, indeterminacy may feature in pragmatism or process philosophy. However, we still see studies that remain trapped into some form of truth-finding. An orientation toward capturing a kind of knowing prevails so that readers can put it in their epistemic bags. This leaves less room for a fundamental impediment that goes beyond ephemerality (as process studies do), social constructions (as constructivism does), intersubjective encounters (as phenomenology does), or daily experiences (as pragmatism does). This unavoidable impediment is the intractability of truth; the otherness of what we pursue as knowledge-seekers and culminates in unknowability. Paradoxically, this ontological thesis remains largely underexplored across all traditions in management.

Thus, my criticism of nomothetic inquiry may be not new, but my angle is not anti-positivist alone but sort of “anti-knowing,” that is, against knowing as a conclusive orientation, irrespective of the means we use to reach it. Thus, I do not seek to replace an approach (positivism) with another but to highlight that our exclusive orientation toward knowing suffers from fundamental weaknesses. To do so, I adopt a metaphysical grounding: The world is constructed via contingent interactions that reform it in perpetuity. Hence, unknowability shares commitments with phenomenology, pragmatism, and process studies. Yet, whether “knowing” is achieved via process, hermeneutics or another analytical template is secondary. What matters is that, often, studies seem entrapped in an epistemology where *ignorance is a defect* that can be *fixed*. Unknowability though is not ignorance, that is, a temporal state of not knowing that represents a momentary transition from non-knowledge to a state of knowledge. Unknowability is not a soon-to-be knowledge that is in a dormant state or something that is not yet known. Rather, it is *endemic* to what we inquire about and, thus, inescapable. Then, our optimism to know is couched in a *rectifiable ignorance*. Not only does this render us infatuated with knowing but also disregards the inherent unknowability as a common thread in our field.

A suggestion

Unknowability underscores “what education is *for*” (Biesta, 2009:355; emphasis in original). An unknowability-inspired education does not socialize learners into extant orders, nor does it lead to a qualification; it is not a process that secures (Allen, 2017) or a purpose leading to effectiveness (Hay, 2023). Rather, it inspires, orients, guides, or sensitizes (Driver, 2013; Freire, 2021). Surely, framing reality as being in the making is an apt step. Yet, it still misses the role of unknowability in a reality that teems with epistemic impossibilities. Accepting this is recognizing that management settings afford verisimilitude, not knowing; approximation, not verification; reasons to be narrated, not causes to be proved (Bruner, 1991; Gilson, 2011). Hence, below, I propose a suggestion.

Given reality’s undeterminable nature, a theory of knowledge must shed light on what remains unknowable. For this, we need narratives. By “narrative,” I do not mean a blueprint that culminates in testable hypotheses, as so often happens. Thus, my suggestion is not about a data-less orthodoxy but about conceptual works that afford fallible imagination and bring forth an ethos of doubt and reasoned speculation (Freire, 2021). Surely, narratives do not engender superpowers but can question a doctrine: knowledge is a domain to be conquered, and positivist knowing is its peak. This sustains a bias: what cannot be proved is unimportant. Yet it may be part of the truth we seek to access. Solvability or provability may help. But, if crude empiricism sees solutions or proofs as *conclusive outcomes*, knowledge becomes unduly lionized. Disregarding unknowability then closes the door to metaphysics and overlooks what lies in-between ontology and epistemology, a liminal space that is pertinent for fields such as ours, less exact ones: What can we *not* know? Answering augments rather than undermines our epistemic tendencies; we must only do so beyond norms of facticity and the ostensive knowability of “things.”

Evidential inflation

An unknowability-laden approach is inspired by *evidential inflation*, which denotes that we are bombarded with an overwhelming amount of information, facts or truths (e.g. as a result of unparalleled computational abilities, big data and AI; Barros et al., 2023; Calvard, 2016). However, these outcomes do not only add to knowledge; they also reconstitute its archeology and future. Knowledge is not a utopian repository that mounts up as time passes; it is our teleological leaning toward knowing that sustains this additive illusion. Knowledge is also contested and rethought, especially when logics reshuffle or political agendas change. Then, does this excessive material (the plethora of PhDs, empirical articles, corporate datasets etc.) enhance our knowability or obfuscate it? Does it build up epistemic confidence or aggravate hubris toward knowledge attainment?

For example, how will a future organizational archeologist interpret the data increasingly construed about workplaces (e.g. the tweets by social media managers and our articles about them)? What sense might this new breed of scholar make about working in and writing about 21st century organizations? If we accept reality's undeterminable nature, evidential inflation is analogous to interpretational possibilities and correlated with space for renewed inquiry (Cruikshank, 2010; Cunliffe, 2008). It lends itself to "doubt" and "dissent," not certainty and consensus (Meyer and Quattrone, 2021: 1373). Accessing new data, evidence, facts—all those scaffolding items of "knowing"—does not lead to additive knowledge only; it also readjusts the scope and magnitude of our unknowability.

Thus, we see a symbiosis of "knowing-too-much" and "still-not-knowing." How is this paradox resolved? To ease tensions, hermeneutical speculation, not only rigid knowing (Freire, 2021); affinity to a fallible, precarious knowing, not only confirmation or proof, must be privileged (Hay, 2023). However, such non-definite modes of knowledge attainment do not accord with science. Speculation, serendipity, and imagination are seen as arbitrary and belong to art or fiction. At best, they are "tolerated" at the outset of scholarly projects and exemplified in a core tool of inquiry, that is, hypotheses development. Finally, though, given validity and reliability as the hallmarks of science, we rush into testing those hypotheses through more data. Thus, we celebrate only concrete answers and authoritative truths; or else, the epistemic task falls apart. By insisting on this evidential accumulation though, learning becomes redolent of what Freire's (2018) critiqued as "banking education" and Cunliffe (2022) as "masculinized rationality," that is, a hierarchical system of knowledge dissemination that is laden on a pre-deposited content and the straitjacketing of scholarly activity. Subsequently, our answer to the vagaries and intricacies of management settings is additional "knowing" outputs via a larger and more disciplined evidential basis.

Enabled wayfinding proposes something else: empirics may amplify the role of data, but we must treat them as part of a wider fabric of fragile explanation and vulnerable understanding, not conclusiveness. This plea for warranted indeterminacy in epistemic endeavors is not cynical and distrustful to science; it is a realistic reflection on (a) the ethical and political nature of our scholarly craft; (b) the radically contingent reality and, subsequently; (c) the idealized assumptions of expertise in accessing truth by scholars (Bell and Willmott, 2020). For these reasons, explicit reference to what cannot be known is due. For example, how can we stick to nomothetic certainties in the era of AI, when so much is as-yet-possible (Giroux, 2010) or impossible (Levinas, 1985)? Then, glorifying data makes us less able to detect the corrosion or incompleteness of our understanding whereas, what we need is practical insights and civic imagination to understand not only current developments but moral repercussions and impossibilities, too (Freire, 2021).

In this effort, unknowability not only expands "capacities necessary for human agency" (Giroux, 2010: 718) but also helps us embrace the deviant, the oppressed, and the unmarked (Freire, 2021; Kabgani, 2024). Then, echoing works on reflexive epistemology (Allen, 2017; Iszatt-White et al.,

2017; Segal, 2010), I complement nomothetic inquiry with a metaphysically plural, humanly sensible and interpretive approach to scholarship and learning. This implies: How does unknowability play out in what we think we know? Namely, research does not need to lead to a truth claim—a thesis that elevates our role as scholars and challenges what nomothetic inquiry purportedly achieves through (in)valid dualisms or desiderata such as correspondence and prediction.

Otherwise, an attachment to unilateral knowing makes us unprepared for evidential inflation. How can we absorb the avalanche of facts that come to our attention? How can we make sense of evidence when they not only add to knowledge but also open unanticipated realms to explore? Our confidence in the epistemic task has made us lethargic to these nuances. The more we insist on the illusion of concrete knowing, the more we weaken our ability to assess moral and political ramifications of evidential inflation. This is crucial because graduates will manage people, lead teams, and make decisions based on our findings. However, epistemology cannot be separated from axiology; their nexus reconstitutes the knowledge we can access and use (Rhodes, 2009; Zyphur and Pierides, 2017). Thus, together with its production, we must agree what kind of knowledge we accept as truth. A new inconclusiveness emerges with each knowledge conquest, and our knowing utopia keeps evading us. To help with this conundrum, I theorize enabled wayfinding.

Enabled wayfinding

How can we harness these remarks in class? Enabled wayfinding refers to learning modes geared toward cultivating students' ability to make sound idiosyncratic judgments amid unknowability. The concept resembles *phronesis* (Śliwa and Cairns, 2009), and *wise practice* (Rooney and McKenna, 2008), manifestations of practical coping that share a denominator: agents' ability to act based on accumulated knowledge (via experience, studies etc.) and what context particularities afford (industry norms, resource endowments, etc.). Yet, enabled wayfinding is idiosyncratic, and additional nuances must be stressed.

First, the concept is geared toward *teaching and learning*, not leadership or strategic change (see Kitchener and Delbridge, 2020). Its goal is to nurture a requisite quality, but this is actualized during one's professional life. Second, it educates students to cope with unknowability as a distinct achievement, not to reconfigure *situational facts and data*. Thus, enabled wayfinding is not about orchestrating known circumstances in the hope of another knowledge outcome; rather, it seeks to reflect on a state of not knowing that looms over one's actionable horizon. Third, it is predicated on *synergistic effort*, not just on students' cognitive processing (hooks, 2014). Educators are expected to be enablers and learners to be wayfinders but contingent swapping is certainly possible. Fourth, by *nurturing a quality*, enabled wayfinding strives for something more oblique than knowledge; that is, to help learners surmise, be inspired, imagine, or estimate with such processes culminating in execution of judgment. Hence, it is about a genuine recognition of limits that is schematized after learners leave their "enablers." Then, educators have an opportunity: to transform students from knowledge-seekers into discerning wayfinders.

During this pursuit, formative curricula are useful, although the value of nomothetic tools is less about proof than about helping learners become better interpreters. As noted, practice is less conducive to corresponding truths and mechanistic qualities. Management scholars do not study electrons; they study feelings. Thus, nomothetic science is valuable provided that its premises remain open. This implies adjustments and emphasis on wonder and imagination, not only proof and data (Carlsen and Sandelands, 2015); on the ethically deviant, not only the moral standard (Hühn, 2014); on values, not only tasks and goals (Fotaki and Prasad, 2014). Then, in an "enabled" setting, students come across SWOT, PEST, 5 forces, and traditional knowledge is conveyed. However,

this material is refinable, as what seems unknowable may be inaccurately explained but can be reflected upon.

Isn't this non-knowledge a transformative lesson in itself? Is transformation a goal of pedagogy? If yes, enabled wayfinding builds the ethos that a practitioner will be called to demonstrate. Thus, learners have an early opportunity to develop resourcefulness and sensibility about unknowables. Otherwise, relying on nomothetic tools *alone* creates an impression: mastering such tools gives us knowledge to succeed or avoid failure. Still, the curiosity to know is relevant but, at best, it leads to trust in the known. Instead, wayfinding helps us know in less hegemonic ways. It problematizes methods as the proxy of epistemic supremacy and theory as the arbiter of truth. After all, practitioners do not rely on explicit reasoning to act, nor do they passively receive "things." They venture into life as active participants and makers of possibilities; they employ emotions, values, and morality and make choices beyond protocols. Otherwise, due to suboptimal knowledge, the world would be at stalemate; action would stop, risk would not be taken, decisions would be delayed. In a nutshell, nomothetic certainty is misaligned with pragmatic concerns.

Thus, theories do not suffice to vet and describe managerial acts. Practitioners infer, surmise, imagine, remember, and unknowability often drives their choices. Therefore, what I suggest is feeling comfortable with unsettling realities through the suspension of belief and confidence in dealing with things that methods cannot manipulate (see Routley, 2010). For this reason, enabled wayfinding is not about stretching the teaching material in all sorts of directions in the hope of finding a better recipe for success. It is about paying due regard to what remains inaccessible during inquiry while relaxing caveats of bona fide knowledgeability and full agency. It is about helping students recognize the role of experience, emotions, setbacks, faulty judgments, and habits; that managing is an acquired skill crafted by what they will repeatedly do *and* what they cannot know.

I do not discount nomothetic tools. However, they must be imbuing an interpretive sensitivity to, for example, ethical or political circumstances (Freire, 2021). Namely, educators can work with them albeit in reflexive ways. If we pretend that there can be lucid dissemination of findings in class, we neglect what unknowability affords and render the world superficially understood for students. Focus then is on coping, not theoretical universality or analytical accuracy; on sensemaking, not equilibrium or constancy. The latter foci may punctuate extant theories, but in this way, we omit elucidating what renders management so diverse—the tensions, power, compromises, commitments that often deviate from textbook prescriptions. Below then, I elaborate on enabled wayfinding.

Pedagogies of the (im)possible

Practical knowledge is constructed through contestation, consensus, compromises, and reconciliation; realities, which call for requisite learning plasticity. That is, students may cultivate skills through statistics, matrices, curves, and diagrams, but engagement with (im)possibles is also necessary. Then, management scholars should explore decisions or organizations not as future or warranted certainties but as unknowable contexts of potentiality that one must cope with and act upon. Doing so moves us beyond a *single* answer or *correct* solution and redirects focus on reframing questions, revisiting premises, assessing contradictions, or re-evaluating their appropriateness (Crilly, 2023; Freire, 2021).

A case in point is thought experiments, imaginary illustrations that assess what might happen in a potential scenario (Kornberger and Mantere, 2020). These experiments facilitate learning beyond delivery of content, such as how to cope with happenstance, deviance, or omissions. Yet imaginary states are rarely found in theories because their ontologically thin nature makes tracing or documenting difficult. How can we represent what is not evidently real in a diagram? Yet, this situation

should not stop us from imagining what practitioners might do. We can juxtapose theory with alternative or provocative arguments and, unrestrained from the rigidity of the scientific attitude, surmise what aspects of truth we cannot possibly access, and which ones are worth reflecting upon.

Another example is possibility thinking, the interstitial space in-between “what is” and “what might be” that separates knowing from not knowing (Craft, 2015). Possibility studies are a burgeoning field that examines how we “become aware of, explore and enact—or choose not to—possibilities” (Glăveanu, 2023: 436). This pragmatist mode propels us to engage with possible spaces and explore action potentialities. Then, the value of nomothetic tools is not to describe or represent but to think and act “in and on the world” together with an idealistic formation of future worlds (Glăveanu, 2023: 436; emphasis in original). Then, possible spaces extend knowledge via curiosity but also question existing knowledge via wonder; they connect us with what we cannot know but can think about.

Moreover, lesson unplanning is “the process of creating openings in routine exercises by replacing predetermined features with to-be-determined aspects” (Beghetto, 2017: 990). In a teaching case, we replace what firms possess or do with what they might not possess or lose or be unable to do. Hence, unknowability is deliberately introduced, and a mundane issue is turned into a “drastic” situation that calls for adjustments. Such openings animate creativity and moral imagination as opposed to observed “tangibles” in a typical case. Thus, theory becomes a departure point but is revisited for further reflection on managerial dynamics. As such, lesson unplanning does not negate theory but opens it for alternative explanations—what scholars also do when they critically theorize.

Engagement with unknowability can also be achieved through legacy challenges, or case-based problems that address nebulous future-making with solutions (Beghetto, 2017). The process starts with problem identification, which management may assist in resolving (e.g. climate change). Students establish why the issue is worth solving while remaining unknowable. Upon identifying possible futures, students discuss preferred action in groups, sketch a plan, and articulate the expected lasting contribution of their intervention. This enables them to address an unknowable future through an agentic reach that extends beyond the problem and its resolution (e.g. preventing its reoccurrence).

Then, pedagogies of the (im)possible are based on logic and reason but fueled by wonder, creativity, and imagination. Through these, learners start considering what should be avoided and what is worth pursuing or attainable, why managers may be unable to escape past constraints, how they are forced to improvise, or why they eschew moral standards. (Im)possibilities then denote a rare opportunity for learners to start *experiencing indecisiveness*. Freed from textbook prescriptions, indecisiveness moves students beyond the realm of received knowledge while enabling them to get a feel for the contested, aesthetic, moral, or symbolic dimensions of their presence in the world—dimensions that are less conducive to scientific manipulation. By underscoring both potentiality and failure then, such pedagogies offer a genuine way to understand *how we relate* to this world.

That is the difference between enabled wayfinding and nomothetic tools. The latter are uninterested in grounded ways of connecting with non-prescriptive realms. Nomothetic inquiry *objectifies* and *extracts from* the world to give bits of codified knowledge ready for use. Are these bits though the only epistemic assistance to our agency? The answer is no, as, upon their availability, these bits create an undue impression: we possess enough for a comprehensive understanding. Yet knowledge is contingent on how we treat those bits, their phenomenological quality, and their *unavailability* or *irrelevance*, too. Then, encounters with the (im)possible not only instill a missing sensibility but also alert us to an affordance: How should we act when our knowability potential remains limited?

Adjusting the learning infrastructure

The typical learning infrastructure “entails a desire for a form of mastery” (Edwards, 2008: 4). Hence, we see the proliferation of an auditing and accountability culture in universities, which has a core educational implication: Curricula are based on standardized templates and pre-established objectives that must convey a sense of efficiency and immutable certainties (Wheelahan, 2015; 2007; Zembylas, 2005). The content and targets are set in advance, and pressures to conform to societal expectations (e.g. for employability) leave no room for aporetic moments (Janzen, 2013; Wheelahan, 2007). In turn, learning outcomes must be reliable via a measurable link between teaching “inputs” and educational “outputs” (Biesta, 2009). Thus, learning is predicated on presence and predetermination of knowledge, not its absence or deconstruction. However, those educational mantras stigmatize unknowability and sustain a belief: Not knowing is akin to pedagogical failure.

But something lies between visible teaching inputs and desirable educational outputs. For example, there is often a striking lack of consensus among business scholars on what stands as true or there is critical researchers’ resistance against clichés and banal principles. Often, we do not convey those background forces as such disenchantment would downgrade our status as educators. We are supposed to resolve managerial predicaments and are expected to troubleshoot problems. In other words, business education is framed as an “answer” with the promise of business schools to learners being based, not on opacity and incompleteness, but on *knowledge as a stalwart resource*.

Unknowability then seldom appears in program narratives, presumably because learning objectives must be ticked as done at the end of the educational process. However, how different would learning be if we explicitly accounted for unknowability? An example would be a list after learning objectives in a module handbook titled “*What cannot be known*.” Therein, bullet points would detail what students should *not* expect. After all, some themes (e.g. being street-smart; Liang and Wang, 2004; managing futures; Wenzel et al., 2020) are non-teachable, that is, educators may be unable to know; an anathema for university sales teams, but a *learning opportunity* to prepare for mystery, deviance, and unintended effects in class. While this inability is ostensibly resolved via learning standards and objectives, expecting the enigmatic cultivates an ethos. It makes us more comfortable with epistemic vulnerability while building trust between learners and educators (Biesta, 2009).

Yet, to reach this state of emancipatory ignorance (Biesta, 1998) and feel at ease with such unendingness (Edwards, 2008), we must adjust learning strictures. For example, corruption seems illicit to discuss in class but is pervasive. Either because we need consent by firms in a teaching case or due to schools’ vested interests, such topics are untouched by educators (Liang and Wang, 2004). Yet, how can one teach corruption without moral ambiguities, street-smartness without nebulous ends, futures that do not yet exist? Instead of allowing the “situation” itself (e.g. corruption, street-smartness, the future) to inform and guide the pedagogical process, we limit learning to what educators must give as knowledge ready in hand or what they may be willing or allowed to discuss (Vanderstraeten and Biesta, 2001). We rely on the educator instead of the situation; on data, facts and discovered truths while the ineffable, the not-as-yet or the morally delicate remain uncharted. Hence, adjusting the learning infrastructure facilitates a pedagogy of invention where unknowables in a “situation” become an anchor point for learning.

Gazing

Theory is the nomothetic pool from which knowledge is extracted (Ingold, 2023). Through formal learning modes, its content helps managers legitimate action and “manage” by becoming accustomed to attending to “things” referred therein (Bartunek and Ren, 2022). Then, recognizing cues

outside this familiar domain requires a kind of rethinking. Unknowability is the epitome of this but, though ubiquitous, it is *not readily detectable*. It must be made available to our intellect thus, being contingent on our receptiveness.

Prima facie, this attunement seems to require a radical openness to experience. However, deep immersion in a context may also reproduce the known and the familiar and intensify the normative use of recipes unique to a field. What is also needed is a kind of “gazing” understood as a sense of objectification and care to capture the unknowable half with which we must cope. While nomothetic science thematizes the corpus of data by observing, recording, and analyzing, gazing resists this sequential reasoning and is based on engagement with the totality of one’s experiences (Bas et al., 2023). Neither does it circumscribe nor selects and discards data but underscores the “necessity of immersing oneself” in variable, often uncomfortable, situations (Gilson, 2011: 325; emphasis in original). After all, “[d]ata are not what the world offers to us; they are what we extract from it” (Ingold, 2023: 23). Hence, gazing embraces unsettling features, too and enables learners to move beyond the accumulation of knowledge resources per se. Instead, the focus becomes the plausibility that reality affords. Without a felt uneasiness that galvanizes gazing, this “extra” understanding is incomplete.

Therefore, gazing is premised on an ontological remark: Knowledge is not a platonic essence to be unveiled. As such, learning cannot be a cartographic journey from point A (problem, predicament) to point B (solution, answer) via the mediation of impartial facts. Rather, gazing sees data points as *interpretable* parts of this journey, while facets of it remain unknowable and call for the contingent discovery of gaps, deviance, pauses, oppression, or silence. In this sense, gazing illuminates a universal but neglected condition, that is, the vulnerability that characterizes us as humans and as knowledge workers. Instead of treating this condition as a disavowed “generalizable weakness” (Gilson, 2011:310), gazing opens an opportunity to treat our vulnerability as enabling, not as daunting.

This value of gazing is implied in job descriptions, where the specifiable part of a job is articulated. Yet there is also an unspecifiable part that is not conducive to articulation but dependent on one’s ability to exercise discretionary judgment (Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014a). It is this ineffable part that makes management so tightly connected with unknowability. When there are no rules or templates to follow or when tactics cannot be measured or forecast for their appropriateness, vulnerability emerges, and then, gazing becomes imperative. Our quest to “manage” calls for the unspecifiable part to “be brought to specifiable clarity by those involved in it” (Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014a: 229). Or else, by pretending to resolve predicaments via nomothetic universalities and pre-specifiable rules, we strip diversity from the *idiosyncratic* reality we are called to de-puzzle.

Thus, formal modes of inquiry produce knowledge outcomes. Yet, without gazing, intractable aspects that co-shape those outcomes remain unattended. Knowledge becomes a-contextual, whereas reality calls for attending to cues that we fail to notice, let alone appropriate. Hence, management is not only about an accumulation activity but also of detectability skills—an ecological attunement that enables actors to choose what is critical in the context of action. The goal is not discarding what “is” but accounting for what “cannot be” following engagement with the absent and the enigmatic. Gazing then fosters an extra sensibility about “things” that are not readily there while exposing learners to the domain of (im)possibilities. “It is in these moments of exposure that education occurs” (Ingold, 2023: 27), as learners move beyond cognition and *prehend* what is going on via improvisation and coping with the unexpected.

One way to nurture gazing in class is to mix undergraduate students with postgraduates to “serve as a sounding board” to each other (Raelin, 2006: 153). The former may rely on textbooks for knowledge and the latter on their practical encounters with the unfathomable. Relevant questions are: How did theory help you tackle a predicament you encountered? What was missing?

What else did you wish you knew to cope with issues that needed situated responses? Educators can help put questions to the test. “Testing” does not imply final verdicts but insights that contextualize formal knowledge, that is, how theory is an epistemic assist *but also* an impediment to apprehending management realities. This is expected to animate learners’ gazing while indicating something critical: Anticipating and coping do not arise from theories alone. Rather, reflexive sensibility and receptiveness to unknowables are also required (Allen, 2017; Bas et al., 2023).

A vignette

Back when I was a business school student, we were sent to collect data for a project and act as observers of a company’s routines (called “Company Visits”). During those visits, we had the chance to interact with practitioners and discuss topics that were linked to our projects. What always baffled me was how to gather necessary information and, thus, answer the questions posed by our professor. Being ingrained in the illusion of knowing myself, I thought that “solutions” and right “answers” is the purpose. This teleological orientation and the concomitant impossibility of providing something concrete back with certitude was my first confrontation with the world of management out there.

When I became an academic, I recalled those visits. I remembered that managers therein endured the same illusion of knowing as I did. They were senior practitioners, yet when asked a “hard” question during Q&A (e.g. about performance), they looked upon the professor for a “real” answer. Presumably, they speculated that he possesses some sort of privileged access to truth. Instead of appreciating their practical wisdom linked to their industrial or organizational contexts, they assumed that a scholar possesses a panoptic view of reality. They elevated his textbook knowledge and downgraded their own phronesis.

My professor’s answer was variably enlightening. “You know your job better than me.” I was also expecting a kind of scholarly wisdom as an answer, but he refused to give one. Instead, he redirected the question to practicing managers in the room. The most senior one replied by stressing “improvisation,” that is, decisions were not the result of mechanistic analysis or application of a theoretical framework but of sensemaking. On many occasions, they had to confront contextual uncertainty, and the answer was based on their intuition. Often, their decision was about a posture and a life stance, not precision of knowledge.

Now, as an educator, I am bombarded with similar questions from my students. As learners, they are confronted with ambiguous or novel aspects, and I must figure out ways to provide some kind of answer. However, often, I can only offer glimpses of it. Extant literature is not always helpful since, in many instances, findings are fragmented, contradictory, or inconclusive (e.g. see the HRM-performance link). Importantly, for some queries, conclusive knowledge is never expected to be attained (e.g. on ethical dilemmas).

The way out in pedagogical terms is to treat such questions honestly. Namely, instead of presuming holding answers, I explain something critical to students: Often, scholarship belatedly mirrors practice and lags on how we can help you adjudicate and cope with unprecedented or evolving phenomena. While this may ostensibly seem disappointing, it is *our truth* as educators in social sciences. For example, students routinely ask what dictates global corporate performance. In answer, management educators often resort to antecedents such as “integration/responsiveness,” “standardization/adaptation,” “headquarters’ control/subsidiary autonomy,” to name a few. Such balkanization though is akin to zealotry. So, taking this question as a case in point, my “answer” is as follows.

First, I explicate that we do not share a collective understanding of terms such as “control,” “autonomy,” “integration” (see Zyphur and Pierides, 2017). After delineating nuances around these

terms in class, students reflect on the many ways through which terms such as “control” may be understood in management settings (e.g. as a *technique* by a CEO or as *oppression* by employees). Thus, I start by dismantling the essentialization and absolutism we attach to singular words while sketching a reasonableness that is reflective of practice (see “untested feasibility” in Freire, 2021). De-mythicizing such instrumental concepts for management practice provides the foundation to revisit nomothetic reasoning.

Second, I use this variegated nature of concepts to explain that dualisms or theories rarely reflect the complexity of practice. We stretch phenomena to fit extant theories or force-fit restrictive terms to provide a more “manageable” answer to students via disjunctions (Tsoukas, 2017). Hence, students realize that their module handbooks may be replete with formalized learning objectives, but questions remain open-ended and call for additional resonance and reflection. In this way, I equip my students with a hermeneutical advantage (Bruner, 2004), that is, by disconnecting themselves from a priori “correctness” and textbook prescriptions, they use rhetorical constructions to craft feasible possibilities. Thus, they start questioning their original plea for one right answer (see Driver, 2010).

Third, I question epistemological mantras linked to the topic of discussion. For example, in relation to performance, I explain how past observations are unable to predict future states in global settings, that is, where regularity is disrupted, and the causal chain of events changes anew each time (Poulis and Poulis, 2016). Due to an indeterminate world full of possibilities, the finitude of choices prescribed in textbooks may be erroneous. Indeed, theories can be a useful guide to navigate alternatives. However, I underscore that these may be an epistemic assist, but they may also become a “pretence of factuality” (Rhodes, 2009: 654). As such, we must remain open to potentially dismantle them.

Finally, I explicitly stress the unknowability that practitioners confront. Namely, the question is sent back to students: “What can managers *not* know in relation to what you are asking me?” Through signposting their vulnerability, I situate students in the flow of practitioners’ experience, that is, denoting that management is often about taking decisions without knowing or making judgments without being able to predict. Then, I open an exit route out of a learning conundrum. I redirect students’ attention, not to teleological certainty, but to doubt and reflection as keystones of their learning work. Hence, I offer them an authentic learning experience where *understanding* is coupled with knowing; where discontinuities, ruptures and omissions matter as much as data, evidence, and facts.

Discussion

Two categories seem to induce the knowledge generation tensions we experience as scholars. First, the *epistemic context* teems with open possibilities and aggravates unknowability. On the one hand, this context comprises *features of management settings* that are not conducive to definite knowledge such as temporal structures, performative phenomena, or the ephemerality of organizational systems. On the other hand, this context is characterized by *features of management knowledge* such as its politicization or a plethora of values linked to its production that render concrete knowledge impossible. Thus, structural conditions or actors’ subjectivities boost unknowability; or else, the context does not allow knowing with the accuracy dictated by scientific rationality.

Second, we *must* know with certain *epistemic desiderata* featuring as the scholarly norm. Knowledge imperatives set by society, governments, and corporations create a compelling environment in which we need to prove our worth as knowledge-seekers. This is labeled as solutions or answers and coupled with a subtle demand: we have inherited a legacy (e.g. statistics) and epistemological tools (generalization and prediction), which provide what is needed to guide scholarly

effort and reach knowledge. As these suffice for knowledge attainment, we must transfer “findings” in class through formal learning modes.

Consequently, we face an enduring tension. The context aggravates unknowability, and actors press for knowability; we swing like a pendulum between what is required and what is possible; what is expected and what is doable. In this conundrum, others’ expectations (e.g. firms’) substantially influence the field’s development and animate our knowledge-seeking tendencies. We add to our knowledge repository, with evidential inflation being the effect of those tendencies. While some of this inflated productivity can be extracted as knowledge, at the same time, the output readjusts the scope and magnitude of unknowability. That is, limits to knowing are redrawn ad infinitum. This is not a hopeless revisionism or dead end but a recognition that management knowledge is fleeting and inconclusive; a genuine acknowledgment that things cannot be otherwise.

The proposal here is to complement extant learning tools with enabled wayfinding. Their *synthesis* may ease tensions and prompt honest acts of knowing. Namely, learning is not about one more knowledge outcome but about anticipating and reflecting upon what we cannot know, too. Yet, enabled wayfinding is not just about “envisaging” or “imagining” but grasping that nomothetic axioms are unlikely to stand on their own. Thus, tools such as Popperian falsification or Humean causality are not discarded nor are theories enemies to situational implementation and coping. After all, some theories are more fallible, insightful, or practical than others, and evidence may help us draw necessary distinctions. Yet, knowledge is nurtured by both theories *and* engagement with unknowable realms. Treating them separately results in a fragmentation that eventually finds itself into the class.

Nevertheless, as shown, while intractability of knowledge may be a new source of learning, classificatory epistemologies compartmentalize truth and portray theories as instruments for immediate use. For example, research provides educators with “material” but treats other instances as noise to be silenced (see control variables in representational modeling). To insulate learning from a kind of epistemic contamination, we transmit universality and confident generalizations while stripping away surrounding complexity. While tools to counter this silence exist (e.g. ethnomethodology, imagining futures, dramaturgy, speculative pedagogies), educators often ignore teaching implications (Hühn, 2014). This is not mere semantics; it constrains our ability to convey useful lessons in class.

Of course, this itemization of facts is justified under the prism of logical empiricism. Yet, in this way, learners become mere spectators instead of mobilizing skepticism to *approximate* truth. In turn, we sustain a belief: Modes such as covariance suffice to explain multifaceted phenomena. Thus, learners simply have to consult their textbooks for “answers” or “solutions.” Yet, by treating scholarly knowledge as information bits, we resort to a truism, that is, the more learners are equipped with such resource sets, the better they will perform. This transmission logic equates learners with containers to be filled (Ingold, 2021) and treats data as inherently trustworthy (Zyphur and Pierides, 2017). It disengages learners from their practice settings and, thus, from knowledge constructed in situ. Then, it not only de-centers human agency but also frames organizations as being dependent on managers’ knowledge. This hero-ification of managerial agency is misleading, that is, what someone possesses may be irrelevant in *a* workplace, *an* organization, for *a single* practice (Tsoukas, 2017). In such cases, formal knowledge retreats, and intuition or improvisation takes center stage in the unique tasks that practitioners perform.

I do not seek to dispose theories as they equip learners with a reasonableness that may be missing from raw intuition or ad hoc improvisation. However, theories can deceive, too. While classic perspectives treat managers as data processing machines, what if scholars acquire *more evidence* but less relevant knowledge? Research builds on *accessible* data, not on fitting or complete ones. Given this constraint, we must subject theories to further scrutiny, that is, are data congruent with

reality and in sync with what we still miss? Otherwise, we idolize managerial agency and portray theories as de facto veridical. But, when practitioners act, they do not inherently know; they just *try* (e.g. engage, improvise, adapt) against their own limitations and due to their entrainment in particular value systems (Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014a). So, enabled wayfinding cannot offer tools to address an immovable reality as typical theory does. Rather, it seeks to mold an ethos of coping with doubt, mystery, serendipity and the myriad facets of unknowability that we confront. Like craft-makers who cement tacit knowledge by doing, learners' exposure to such pedagogies crafts cognitive, moral, emotional skills they will need later as practitioners.

This critique connects unknowability with other management concepts. For example, functional stupidity (Alvesson and Spicer, 2016) refers to the deliberate suppression of thinking in organizations. It differs from unknowability since it implies a largely intentional behavioral stance; we portray something else than what we truly are or believe, for example, to avoid repercussions in the workplace. Contrarily, unknowability is about authentically experiencing an innate inability; we do not mask but recognize an epistemic opacity as important. Yet, the concepts share a common feature: They challenge notions of knowledgeability and thoughtful reasoning that pervade management thought and managerialist talk. Namely, both concepts demonstrate that management is an act that takes place in the context of epistemic incompleteness and compromises. What allows learners to live this incompleteness is not theory, but engagement with such settings.

This incompleteness opposes what theory dictates (e.g. high performance because of great decisions). Rather, because of states such as stupidity, organizational outcomes are often the result of serendipity or omissions; luck or avoidance; happenstance or deviance, not calculative rationality or virtuoso environmental scanning. So, unknowability, functional stupidity (Alvesson and Spicer, 2016); masculinized rationality (Cunliffe, 2022); engaged judgment (Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014b) challenge a core assumption in management pedagogy: A kind of wisdom floats around, and if we capture it, we can perform "better" than others (e.g. see the centrality of resource-based views or industrial organization theories in explaining superior corporate performance). This confidence in managerial agency creates contrived expectations of success among students and reproduces nonsense about the daily doings and happenings in workplaces. So, such concepts offer a more authentic learning experience; one that prepares students for what they will encounter in management settings. I recognize the likelihood of such concepts discouraging students, too. However, the learning gains of being early exposed to reality are more than the short-term benefits of portraying management as empty cheerleading.

Contribution

What can unknowability allow? For example, it enables a closer link with practitioners who are inclined to act honestly (Martela, 2015). It also facilitates process studies, which suppose an awareness of the non-disclosure of our knowledge (de Vaujany and Introna, 2024). Being aware of this incompleteness is empowering, thus, potentially contributing to Lacanian studies, too (Glynos and Stavarakakis, 2018). Then, this article shares insights with pragmatism or process traditions. Yet, it also contributes as follows:

First, the essay underscores the paradox of wanting to know while never reaching it in these terms. Hence, nomothetic inquiry is critiqued because, when framed as veridically mirroring reality, it unduly regulates thought and constrains pedagogical action. Instead, herein, it is reframed as an aid that helps learners *cope with unknowables*. This is a neglected goal in management scholarship, which is infused with an overarching optimism about our ability to know. However, this optimism is unjustified and, in fact, unnecessary. As elaborated previously, acknowledging

unknowability is not a pessimistic admission of defeat but the most honest act of knowing we can realistically pursue.

Second, as a response to associated tensions, I conceptualized enabled wayfinding. The concept recasts the epistemic project as an “estimate” or “guess” and reconfigures knowing as “probability” or “approximation” via an ontology of the non-evident but real. It still avails of matrices, theories, diagrams, and other nomothetic tools. Yet, it does so *as interpretive devices* that learners use to make sense of phenomena, not as conclusive truths. After all, not knowing something does not mean that we cannot think or reflect on this something; we can. Thus, I advocate an empirical sensitivity that is closer to the predicaments and realities we study. Namely, not knowing is not just okay; it is the *modus operandi* of practicing managers, the end points of our epistemological attention out there.

Third, the way unknowability is woven into teaching practices denotes a path from crass to Socratic ignorance. Students pass through not knowing (at the start of their studies) to seemingly knowing (due to theory) and from emancipatory ignorance (when they develop critical thought) to empowerment (after recognizing unknowability). Due to setbacks and adjustments, this does not imply linear progression but a transition, which challenges the typical dependence on the teacher and the stultification linked to a mere delivery of content (see Rancière, 1991). Yet, enabled wayfinding is not just about leaving the sonority of theory aside or questioning tutors’ mastery; it is about unknowability assuming its own identifiable position in our epistemic undertakings. Otherwise, a threat looms: to replace one theory with another just because of, for example, one’s idiosyncratic views. If we genuinely recognize the role of unknowability in our epistemic capacity, replacing one knowing mantra with another is not the issue; after all, a replacement may or may not be “right.” The point here is to treat unknowables as discernible and assessable elements of reality and turn our gaze toward “things” we study, albeit via orientations beyond knowing *per se*. So, unknowability is not an epistemological impediment to overcome (the typical framing in literature), but an ontological thesis of profound pedagogical implications.

Fourth, the essay illuminates the way knowledge is used. That is, in-between knowledge production and its dissemination lies an *interstitial space of non-reflection* linked to how our findings are seen as proxies for truth. Thus, I advance the incorporation of a meta-theoretical lens for pedagogical purposes. Treating theories as encompassing truth at face value, we accept them as the single way through which learners should think and act. Research findings become an unassailable edifice to protect, and empirical frameworks become final products that orchestrate learners’ choices. Instead, enabled wayfinding sees these only as tools that may further sharpen learners’ coping abilities.

Conclusion

Management scholarship is aware of these slippery slopes as a result of scrutinizing its own rationality (Parker, 2018; Tourish, 2019). This is fortunate because when we consider who claims a stake in knowledge development (tech evangelists, fortune sellers, mentoring gurus), our scholarly identity emerges as crucial. Would management be better off if it left knowledge creation to self-proclaimed “experts”? No! Thus, unknowability does not imply that scholarly expertise is not required or that repositories of knowledge (journals) are redundant. Opposing episteme because of unknowability would be naive. Yet, if theorizing equals generalizable accuracy or predictability through parameter estimates, p-values, and statistical significance, who will elate, excite, or sensitize us? Who will occupy the unclaimed territory and link us with pressing societal challenges? The answer is “experts” who do not possess scholarly qualities. Arbitrariness will reign supreme, and the “anything goes” logic that science typically combats will become more prevalent.

Without unknowability then, management in the hands of unreliable “experts” runs the risk of being seen as conjecture. Instead, unknowability offers an opportunity to reclaim our central position in the knowledge stage. By embracing unknowability, we have the intellectual capacity to insulate the domain from arbitrary pursuits *and* the skills to maintain rigor; qualities that self-professed gurus do not possess or are uninterested in using. Otherwise, we will keep observing “data” that purportedly prove; “findings” that enable the rise of these gurus; “answers” to various predicaments; and “recipes” that promise success and entrepreneurial salvation. In contrast, unknowability enables an *honest act of knowing*; one that evidential inflation currently undermines. If we then wish to restore a balance that is lost or reimagine a more sanguine place for data, regressions, formal logic, and what I critique as nomothetic inquiry herein, we need the right mix of epistemic humility and practical maxims to deal with the intricacies of management settings. Enabled wayfinding lends itself to this new learning and opens possibilities for progress other than “knowing.”

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Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Note

1. As a reviewer noted, Lacan posed such statements but himself has since superseded. For example, he developed mathèmes, seeking the logic of fantasy and the unconscious, but his later teachings acknowledge the impossibility of such an undertaking. Not that mathèmes are false, but part of reality escapes them.

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