

Stalinism at Academy of Management Review

As a member of the editorial board of Academy of Management Review (AMR) - which has been one of my prides since the journal is number one in the world in its field - I get review assignments. I got one paper I found surprisingly weak, considering the fact that it was submitted to the number one journal in the world. I made a comment to the editor that it should have been desk rejected. This means that I thought it should not be sent out for review in order to not burden the voluntary staff of reviewers that are working out of a community feeling for AMR. Next paper I got was even worse. I would not have allowed any of my doctoral students, not even first year doctoral student, to burden our small research group with that kind of a paper. After making the review of this very bad paper, I asked a clear question to the editor, why the paper was sent for review and why it was not desk rejected. For me, always prepared to learn, I wanted to know what error I made in my judgement, since the editor found it worthy a review and I did not. An argument from the editor, and I would understand how to understand quality of a paper that I was not capable of understanding.

I got the response from Roy Suddaby, the editor of AMR, that his overall policy was to have a wide net, which probably means that he is prepared to assume higher risks with the papers. He then wrote that the responsibility of a reviewer, especially one from the editorial board, was to make a constructive review. And finally, and now I cite directly from his e-mail:
“Nor do I feel any need to explain or justify my decision to send a paper out for review.”

Let me repeat that sentence, made by the editor of AMR:

“Nor do I feel any need to explain or justify my decision to send a paper out for review.”

When I was young, I was part of the socialist movement. We were proud democrats feeling sorry for our comrades in the communist movement that had to endure, among other things, the Stalinist principle. That was what I today would term a strong authoritarian hierarchical principle. It had two variants. You could have a discussion about an issue but after decision, it was implementation and silence. No opposition allowed. No arguments. No debate. The other variant was that if someone in the hierarchy had to make a decision, afterwards it was implementation and no discussion. No arguments. No debate. Just implementation and obeying.

For us, young socialists, to have decisions without discussion, both before and after, were signs of Stalinism. And Stalinism was awful and unthinkable. We were proud Scandinavian socialists.

I then left the political life since living in Academia always imply arguments, arguments, and then even more arguments. Even the debate among socialist were too restricted for academic work.

The letter from Roy revived the old time. My fear of Stalinism. My disgust and loathe for Stalinism. I was given no argument. I was not considered worthy an argument. But I had to obey, to do the review in a constructive manner: “Nor do I feel any need to explain or justify my decision to send a paper out for review.”

It is beyond my understanding how someone in academia can write these words. Academia is to argue and then argue again. Stalinism is to say that I do not have to argue. I am the Boss. The words of Roy are the words from a hierarchical boss. A Stalin. Exempt from the need to motivate his decision. The untouchable Boss.

Roy's sentence is very offensive for me to read and to be exposed to. I have enjoyed my time with AMR, under the editorship of Amy Hillman. She argued, she was an academic editor, prepared to argue for her point of view and decision.

I cannot be part of an organisation that now has started to implement Stalinism. As long as Roy is editor of AMR, with his Stalinist policy of silence and obedience blind for reason, I cannot be part of AMR. I cannot do service to such an organization. Therefore I have left AMR, as a member of the editorial board and as a potential ad hoc reviewer.

I was not part of Stalinism when I was young. I will certainly not be part of it today.

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