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Curiosity Didn't Kill the Cat

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Barbara Czarniawska is Senior Professor of Management Studies at Gothenburg Research Institute, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. She takes a feminist and processual perspective on organizing, recently exploring connections between popular culture and practice of management. She is interested in techniques of fieldwork and in the application of narratology to organization studies. Recent books in English: *Social Science Research from Field to Desk* (2014) and *A Research Agenda for Management and Organization Studies* (ed., 2016).

When I was first asked how I came to work on the problems I have chosen, I thought that the answer was obvious and simple: curiosity. The longer I thought about it, though, the more complex the answer became. I finally counted at least four reasons for my choice of research topics.

Curiosity is still number one. My doctoral dissertation was a combination of my knowledge of psychology and economics; the result was a speculative model of motivation to work, of which I was rather proud. Yet I was still curious about whether it would work in practice. I presented it to managers I was meeting at courses we were offering at the University of Warsaw and asked them for anonymous, written comments. They all agreed: The model was truly impressive, but it would never work in this country (Poland) at that time (the 1970s). Somewhere else, perhaps: USA?

When I went to MIT on an ACLS fellowship, I decided to check this possibility. First, I discovered that "motivation to work" was simply a euphemism for "control"; second, I discovered that those US corporations I studied applied control mechanisms that were much closer to those thought to be typical for centrally steered economies than were the rather muddled controls employed in Polish state-owned enterprises.

No wonder the results were not appreciated in either Poland or the USA. Actually, when I submitted one of my first English-language articles to a journal, its editor told me that it seemed that I wrote this to satisfy my own curiosity. He meant it (with best of intentions) as a constructive critique, but I didn't understand how it could be otherwise — and I still don't.

Nevertheless, I was soon to discover that there could be other reasons to choose a research topic: I would call it *contingency*. When I immigrated to Sweden, the job I was offered required that I study public-sector organizations. I considered it an enormous if necessary sacrifice. Studying public sector organizations in Poland meant summarizing a plethora of boring laws and bureaucratic rules that applied to them. Little did I know that there could be different kind of studies with far-from-boring results. So when the next contingency offered me an opportunity to join The Power and Democracy project, I did it without hesitation. I had to admit, though, that within the project I studied what I wanted and how I wanted to study it.

Yet another reason to start (and continue for a long time!) a research interest was the *infectious enthusiasm of my colleagues and later co-authors*. Thus, Bernward Joerges convinced me that city management is a fascinating subject and Orvar Löfgren later persuaded me that the management of overflow is equally worthy of attention. Ten years on each, and I am not sure I am done.

The final reason, which relates only to my gender studies, I would call *disbelief*. I cannot believe that 80 years after Maria Curie Skłodowska or 40 years after Maria Ossowska (Polish sociologist who initiated studies of science), the situation of women in science is, if not worse, certainly not much better than it was in their time. I cannot believe, that after the long chain of women rulers, beginning with Cleopatra and continuing with Empress Catherine the Great, Queen Victoria, Queen Elizabeth, and Angela Merkel, women are still not supposed to rule countries. My disbelief could be related to the fact, that when (and where) I was growing up, the idea of women becoming housewives was extremely exotic; some antique prejudice. Alas, it came back with force even in Poland, which is another reason for my disbelief. What is worse, this study topic seems to be inexhaustible.