

I Rethinking the Map of Management History

To think differently about management, we need to shake up the map of management history.

This book takes aim at an unnoticed barrier to innovation: the conventional history of management. We take as our particular target the form in which this history is most often experienced by management initiates: management textbooks. The purpose of these textbook histories, in the words of those who develop them, is to 'put the present in perspective' and 'to help us understand today's management theory and practice'. But this approach, we argue, justifies present practices as part of an evolutionary advance and makes it less likely that substantive change will occur. A New History of Management seeks to counter the assumptions that this conventional view promotes in order to question the present, blur the boundaries defined by simplistic versions of the past and to encourage thinking differently for the future. This first chapter surveys the current narrow and homogeneous map of management history and outlines a methodology for a deeper historical understanding that can encourage people to think differently about management.

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As a starting point in our new exploration of the history of management, we sought a snapshot of what historians have previously seen as worthy of investigation.¹ We surveyed the most highly regarded journals of management and business history to ascertain the geographical locations that they focussed on. We coded the 859 articles from the journal *Business History* published over the past six decades; 894 from the journal *Business History Review* for the same period; and the 234 and 78 respectively published in the more recently established *Journal of Management History* and *Management and Organization History*. About 80 per cent of the articles could be coded for their geographic focus, or which part of the world the article was about. We sent the results to *Worldmapper.org* to create a map that depicted the world in terms of the relativities in the data. The picture on the page opposite is the world according to management and business history journals (Figure 1).² In this world, the two Anglo giants, the UK and the US, dominate. Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa just about hold their own, while the rest of Africa, Asia and South America shrink to slivers.

This is obviously problematic from the perspective of wanting to encourage diversity. But where this is less obviously problematic is that this picture may be reflective of a potential decline in innovation in management and it is this that is the focus of this book. Our thesis may be summed up in a sentence: *if we are to think differently, truly innovatively, about management, we may have to look again at and rethink our historical assumptions about our field.*

This idea differs from those reasons put forward by scholars recently as to why we may have seen a decline of substantially new

¹ This chapter draws on material from Clark, P. & Rowlinson, M. (2004). The Treatment of History in Organisation Studies: Towards an 'Historic Turn'? *Business History*, 46(3), 331–52; Cummings, S. & Bridgman, T. (2016). The Limits and Possibilities of History: How a Wider, Deeper, and More Engaged Understanding of Business History Can Foster Innovative Thinking. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 15(2): 1–18.

² The authors wish to thank Benjamin D. Hennig and Danny Dorling at the University of Sheffield and www.worldmapper.org for kindly developing this map based on our data.

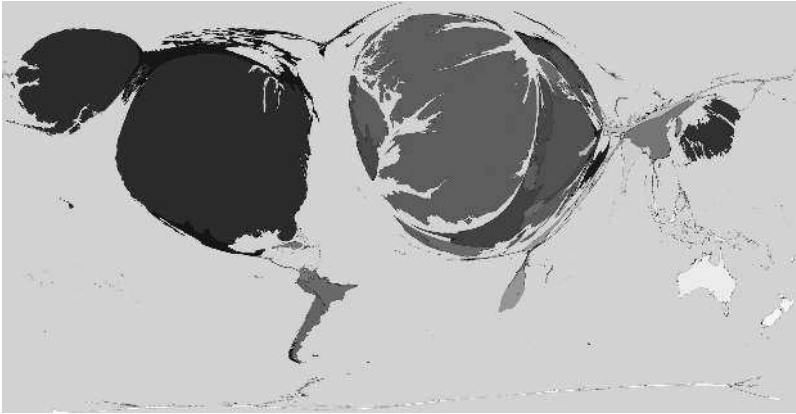


FIGURE 1 The Map of Management History
Source: Worldmapper.org (reproduced with permission from Worldmapper.org)

ideas in management studies. They have suggested a range of other limits. For example, a low-risk inductive-deductive approach to copying 'best practice' rather than aiming abductively for next practice (Martin, 2009; Nattermann, 2000; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004); theorizing in ways that are disconnected from the realities of management practice (Clark and Wright, 2009; Cornelissen and Floyd, 2009; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Smith and Lewis, 2011); a desire to borrow theories from other fields rather than develop unique theories (Oswick, Fleming and Hanlon, 2011; Whetten, Felin and King, 2009); professional norms that privilege research appealing to traditional conventions and highly ranked forums (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011; 2012; Bartunek, Rynes and Ireland, 2006; Grey, 2010; Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011); and the limiting institutional conditions of theory development in business schools (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2012; Clark and Wright, 2009; Grey, 2010). Our book provides another reason: that the current lack of innovation has roots in the past, or more specifically, in management research's narrow view of what in its past is relevant. The limited way in which we have recorded our past limits what we focus on and how we theorize in the present and consequently bounds progression. New possibilities and

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interconnections can result from a deeper, broader and more engaged connection with history.

While history has occasionally been noted in debates about the lack of innovation in management, the view that looking forward is the source of new ideas is still promoted: ‘we still look to the “founding fathers” for our fundamental questions and our methods for answering them. We carry the historical baggage of their underlying assumptions. And, like lost colonial outposts, we retain a sentimental attachment to the tools, constructs and limitations of our core disciplines’ (Suddaby, Hardy and Huy, 2011, p.237). The implication is that if management is able to escape from its history, thinking will be freed to be more in keeping with new times and to be more innovative. We argue the opposite: rather than running away from history and paying it less attention, we should dive back in, take a broader look and uncover more than the narrow view recorded in conventional histories of management. More history rather than less could promote greater innovation.

A New History of Management subsequently advocates an approach that may seem contrary to logic: that looking back in this way can foster a greater plurality of ideas that can be debated, challenge one another and be combined to promote innovative thinking. We argue that the limited, one-dimensional, uni-cultural way in which we have recorded our field’s past can limit what we focus on in the present and how we face the future.

The elements of this argument are not new. There is increasing awareness about the links between greater diversity leading to more innovation, idea generation and more creative problem solving. One of the first scholarly books on creativity, Arthur Koestler’s (1970) *The Act of Creation*, links creativity to the Latin verb ‘cogito’ (to think), which, he explains, ‘means to “shake together” . . . the creative act, by connecting previously unrelated dimensions of experience is an act of liberation [and] defeat[er] of habit’ (Koestler, 1970, p.96). As Koestler’s work has been revisited in recent times, interest in this idea has grown. Scholarly research has promoted diversity of

perspective as a means of countering the effects of ‘dominant logic’ and spurring creativity and innovation (e.g., Bettis and Prahalad, 1995; Jackson et al., 2003; Kearney and Gebert, 2009; Polanyi, 1981; Prahalad and Bettis, 1986; Shin and Zhou, 2007; Williams and O’Reilly, 1998). Others have linked a reducing range of citations, and a focus on recent articles and a faster forgetting of works from earlier ages (what is sometimes referred to now as ‘attention decay’), to a narrowing of scholarship and a reduction in significant new knowledge development (Evans, 2008; Parolo et al., 2015). And a range of popular books have appeared trumpeting everything from the ‘Medici Effect’, or the Medici’s ability to bring together leaders in a range of disciplines (Johansson, 2006); how a diversity of ‘visions’ contributed to the creation of the American Constitution (Ellis, 2012); Einstein’s breadth of life experiences (White and Gribbin, 2005); and the range of personalities that Edison assembled (in addition to his own peculiarities) at Menlo Park (Baldwin, 1996).

Indeed, a good example of how innovation emerges from diverse characteristics combining or ‘bisociating’ (to use the Koestler’s term for this idea) can be seen in Edison’s notebooks. Edison’s ideas books were divided in two. Edison would scrawl out his barely legible flashes of inspiration. And then, on the facing page, an associate, such as precise and highly organized Charles Batchelor, would work out these ideas more fully and start to plan out if and how they might be realized (Figure 2). Neither Batchelor nor Edison’s approach, on its own, was innovative: innovation emerged when the two were ‘shaken together’.

Furthermore, our argument that looking back can help us to better look forward is not completely new with respect to management history either. Some recent works have linked a neglect of historical awareness to a number of key skills business students are less likely to acquire. They argue that a better understanding of management’s history helps students learn the lessons of past mistakes (Smith 2007; Thomson 2001; Wren 1987a); or establish a link with ‘great minds’ (Bedeian, 2004); or develop a ‘collective memory’, an

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FIGURE 2 Edison's Ideas Book: Edison (left); Batchelor (right)
 Source: This image is from Edison's Menlo Park notebooks and reproduced from the freely available collection that has been compiled and digitized by Rutgers University (<http://edison.rutgers.edu/digital.htm>)

identity for the profession or an integrating framework (Khurana, 2007; Smith, 2007; Wren, 1987a); or that it provides a baseline for evaluating the extent of change in management over time (Jones and Khanna, 2006; Smith, 2007; Thomson, 2001; Wren, 2005; Wren, 1987a); or that a better understanding of history assists students to think about how supposedly 'new' management practices really are (Bedeian, 2004; Smith, 2007; Thomson, 2001; Wren, 2005).

We agree with these assessments. However, it is not just the lack of history teaching that goes on in business schools and who is teaching it that diminishes our field (Wren, 2005). It is also the quality of teaching materials and, in particular, the lack of a critical and creative attitude that prevents history having the positive effect on management's future that it could. Addressing this by promoting

a search for greater diversity would, we argue, offer a further advantage of a historical engagement, which would result not only in better students in the present, but fundamental improvements for the future of our field. *A New History of Management* argues that encouraging people to think critically about the construction of management history will enable them to think more creatively about what management could be.

And the first and best place that we might start thinking critically about the presentation of management history is introductory management textbooks.

THE TARGET: THE TEXTBOOK VIEW OF MANAGEMENT HISTORY

Students want to know what works and what doesn't ... they are not interested in the details of research, the historical evolution of our knowledge, or long discourses on competing ideas.

Stephen Robbins (1997, p.xvii)

Given most management students and scholars only encounter the history of the general field (as opposed to their specialization) in introductory courses and texts, and that textbooks in general play an essential role in codifying and disseminating the foundations and limits of what is important in a field (Kuhn, 1970; Stambaugh and Trank, 2010), management textbooks may provide the best insight into the conventional view of management's origins (Jones and Khanna, 2006; Payne, Youngcourt and Watrous, 2006; Smith, 2007; Wren, 2005). Subsequently, our new history of management starts with exploring how history is presented in these texts.

Typically, studies of textbooks have focussed on the accuracy of the representation of pioneers such as Taylor (Payne, Youngcourt and Watrous, 2006) and critical events such as the Hawthorne Studies (Adair, 1984; McQuarrie, 2005; Olsen, Verley, Salas and Santos, 2004). We, however, are not so much concerned to report on inaccuracies, but to highlight what is promoted, both in terms of the content

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and the process by which this content is seen to develop, and by association left out, so that we might think further about alternative origins.

The views expressed by Stephen Robbins at the head of this section reflect a general undertone in many management textbooks (Robbins goes on to claim that ‘students’ interest in history is minimal’ and that ‘the classical material in management textbooks has little value to today’s students ...’ 1997, p.xvii). This view resonates with broader assumptions about the ideal managers for the ‘new economy’: free floating identities, trained to constantly embrace change, unattached and unencumbered by history (assumptions recently critiqued by Sennett (2006) and Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2009; 2010)). Moreover, this view may be connected to debates in management education, suggesting that our curricula would be more relevant (i.e., better) if it was cut free from teaching subjects for tradition’s sake and reflected what was actually happening in the world of business practice (Bennis and O’Toole, 2005; Mintzberg, 2004; Rubin and Dierdorff, 2009; Worrell, 2009).

But despite this antipathy, a simple ‘potted history’ is found in most introductory texts: almost always in ‘chapter two’ after an introductory chapter (Chapter One will define the field; Chapter Two reinforces this by outlining the history of these definitions). These histories typically identify the key kernel as the assertion of a mechanistic-industrial worldview (if cultures prior to the industrial revolution are incorporated, it is because modern management’s staples, planning, directing, organizing and controlling, are discerned in their achievements, not because they looked at things differently – Tsoukas and Cummings, 1997); and a subsequent belief that since that point, progress has come from the development of a more humanistic and organic understanding. This continuity currently culminates in views about the discovery of contingency, systems approaches and culture, and importance of sustainability and an organization’s responsibility to the wider environment, views claimed to oppose management’s classical approaches. Figure 3 is

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Era	Background to contemporary management	Classical	Human	Calculating	Values & beliefs	Future
Years	1530+	1910–30	1930–50	1950–70	1970–90	1990–
Key ideas associated with each era	Emphasis on materialism & individualism Industrial revolution Increasing prevalence & size of corporations	<i>One best way</i> Scientific mgmt -Taylor Time/Motion Gilbreth Bureaucracy Weber Principles of mgmt - Fayol	Interpersonal aspects	Mgmt science	Social construction, institutionalization, culture etc.	CSR; stakeholder theory Mainstream emphasis on maximizing materialist-individualist goals gets in the way of other forms of well-being (e.g., social, ecological)

FIGURE 3 Management History ‘Road Map’
 Source: Adapted from images and text in *Management: Current Practices and New Directions* (Dyck and Neubert 2008, pp.30–1)

a representation of a map from a recent textbook that illustrates the standard narrative.

While most texts do not outline a historical map as explicitly, one may be discerned in the origin stories told and the subsequent sequencing of chapters in other texts, from the simplest/oldest mechanistic theories to more recent international, diversity-encouraging, ecologically minded chapters towards the end. The content of their descriptions of their field’s history and the process by which it is outlined is strikingly similar, as shown in Table 1.

Where are the key points of origin in the historical narrative outlined in management textbooks taken from? As Table 1 illustrates, sometimes no references are needed: this is common knowledge. But when references are cited, they are similar. They tend to be the few management history books that were written at the time most of these textbook’s first editions were developed (the late 1960s and 1970s). The books written by C.S. George (1968/1972), Daniel Wren (1972), Sidney Pollard (1965) and Alfred Chandler (1962) are utilized to a great extent. Sometimes academic articles are also cited, either from business history journals or in other journals, but with a historical theme. Wren’s books, in particular, cited academic journal research as a basis of his book which formed the basis of many of the histories in

Table 1 *Key Elements of Management’s Origin Narrative in Textbooks*

Textbook	Precedents leading to management	Primary individuals
Bateman & Snell (2009) <i>Management</i>	Poor production efficiency, management decisions unsystematic	Adam Smith → Taylor → Fayol → M Weber → McGregor
Kinicki & Williams (2009) <i>Management</i>	Industrial expansion, labour in short supply, need to improve labour productivity	Taylor → Gilbreths – → Mayo → McGre
Rue & Byars (2009) <i>Management</i>	Rapid industrialization but production methods crude, needed to be improved	Taylor → Barth → Co Gantt → Gilbreths → McGregor → Ma Peters & Waterman
Robbins et al. (2012) <i>Management</i>	Popularity of division of labour, industrial revolution, need to maximize efficiency	Adam Smith → Taylor → Gilbreths → Weber → Fayol → Follet → Mayo → Maslow → McGregor