

## The Liberal Arts and Management Education

Calling for the transformation of undergraduate education, Harney and Thomas argue that the liberal arts should be integrated into the traditional management curriculum to blend technical and analytic acumen with creativity, critical thinking and ethical intelligence. In describing their vision for a new Liberal Management Education, the authors demonstrate how a holistic pedagogy that does not sacrifice one wealth of learning for another instead encourages participation and integration to the benefit of students and society. Global in sweep, the book provides case studies of successfully implemented experimental courses in Asia and Britain, as well as a speculative chapter on how an African Liberal Management Education could take shape, based on African-centred principles and histories. Finally, the book argues that the stakes of this agenda go beyond mere curricular reform and pedagogical innovation and speak directly to the environmental, business, political and social challenges we face today.

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# The Liberal Arts and Management Education

*A Global Agenda for Change*

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Oh my body, make me always a man who questions!

Frantz Fanon

A good traveller has no fixed plans  
and is not intent upon arriving.

A good artist lets his intuition  
lead him wherever it wants.

A good scientist has freed himself of concepts  
and keeps his mind open to what is.

Lao Tze

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## Preface

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By most standards, and despite many criticisms, business and management schools have been one of the major success stories of global higher education, particularly over the last fifty years. The AACSB (Association for the Advancement of Collegiate Schools of Business) estimates that there are around 13,000 institutions globally offering business degrees (Peters, Smith & Thomas, 2018). This is probably a lower estimate of the true number.

As a consequence, it is important at the outset to track the evolution of business schools from a historical perspective. The phases in the evolution of management education can be clearly identified and mapped (see Peters, Smith & Thomas, 2018; Thomas, Lorange & Sheth, 2013).

First, in the 1800s to early 1900s, often called the ‘trade school’ era, early management educators sought to develop a responsible, reflective and insightful managerial cadre acting as professional stewards of an organisation’s resources; this was envisaged by Joseph Wharton, in his founding of the Wharton School in the University of Pennsylvania in 1881.

Second, the period until the 1950s was one in which there were clearly defined national schools, mainly in the United States, and the AACSB was founded in 1916. Nobel laureate Herbert Simon called this period the ‘wasteland of vocationalism’. Khurana (2007) adds that in the United States in the mid-1950s only 150 universities offered business degrees, representing the majority of such degrees worldwide.

Third, path-breaking foundation studies occurred from 1960 to 1990, namely the Gordon and Howell reports, which promoted the development of a golden age of US business schools. The schools were encouraged through grants from the Ford Foundation and Carnegie Foundation to professionalise and strengthen management education; hire faculty with doctorates; produce high-quality publications; adopt a research philosophy of logical positivism; study quantitative methods and behavioural science; and, although not directly stated, have an

anti-communist, pro-capitalist style. These reports, in turn, promoted extraordinary growth in business education degrees globally.

Fourth, there was the advent and storm of the rankings from around 1990, which heralded the dawn of a new era that saw business schools as businesses. The rules of their metrics game were framed by the foundation studies and enshrined in paradigms and models such as the MBA, which had already been widely developed. The rankings era also emboldened European business schools to develop their own identity and their own business models, and schools like LBS, INSEAD and IMD became globally recognised as leading European role models (Fragueiro & Thomas, 2011).

Fifth, since about 2005, we witnessed the emergence of business education models from developing economies such as China, India and other Asian/Latin American economies, reflecting their geographical, contextual and cultural identities. Further, following the global financial crisis, we have seen a period of significant adaptation of business school models, reflecting the impact of the financial crisis and the resulting increasingly complex and volatile political, social and global economic environments.

Yet, in the face of the undoubted success of business schools, we recognise, as Khurana clearly argues, that business schools have become hired hands' of business and have abandoned goals of developing professional managers. We believe that many of the criticisms exemplified in Parker's book (2018), written from a UK perspective, link closely to the dominant paradigms adopted in the early 1990s following the advent of the rankings era. When business schools became 'businesses', the argument is that they taught market managerialism as the 'only game in town and paid lip-service' to issues of sustainability, social justice and inclusion. In those criticisms Parker would be joined by others such as J. C. Spender (2008) and Chris Grey (2005), who described the business school as no more than a finishing school; Richard Whitley, who characterised business schools as educating managerial elites; and Starkey and Tiratsoo (2007) and others, who framed a business school's motivation as indoctrinating students with a fixation on markets and individualism, thus emphasising the primacy and efficiency of markets and the resulting measurement of shareholder value.

Indeed, Sumantra Ghoshal (2005) argued most persuasively that the business schools, in their desire to become serious academic players and be perceived as legitimate in academia, had been guilty of perpetuating and teaching 'amoral theories' that destroyed sound managerial practices and produced managers who were advocates of shareholder value and profit-maximisation rather than responsible professionals.

In so doing, they may have contributed to ethical failures such as Enron and the global financial crisis through, among other factors, a lack of intellectual understanding of both the history of capitalism (e.g. the crash of 1929) and the nature of business cycles.

A key consequence of this amoral focus has been that the self-interest of relevant parties has replaced a proper ethical and moral scope and that the principle of trust, central to the operation of market capitalism, has been either eroded or abandoned.

It is our assertion that the global financial crisis was a watershed in the strategic thinking of many parties in the management education field as the core business models had remained relatively static over time. Deans and management education associations have now increasingly focussed on the need for change, innovation and adaptation of existing models of management education. As Pettigrew and Starkey (2016) clearly noted, this raised critical questions and comments from many observers about the legitimacy and impact of business schools in the fast-paced and uncertain global context.

Indeed, the many studies in management education that Howard Thomas (Thomas et al., 2013b, 2014, 2016a, 2017) and his colleagues have conducted over the last decade have confirmed that there is no ‘one-size fits all’ model of a business school. Schools vary in factors such as their country of origin, their political and social context and their culture and values.

Some business schools have turned the mirror on themselves and have stressed that they have been too slow to take disruption seriously. Nevertheless, it is clear to us that there has been significant change in business schools worldwide, particularly in adapting to technology, digitisation and inclusive growth. Further, and much more significantly, there is important and encouraging evidence from students in both Europe and the United States that business school students have moved on from behaving like customers and acting like greedy profit-maximisers to focussing on purposeful work such as tackling issues of sustainability, inequality and social and financial inclusion; they also aim to achieve a more balanced, holistic view of management education, encompassing all of the key sectors of the economy, namely business, government and civil society.

Consequently, we believe strongly that we need more holistic, balanced management education models and have some sympathy for Martin Parker’s proposition that we devise ‘schools for organising’, which focus on sustainability, social justice and inclusion. Indeed, this is a valuable suggestion. It is clear from World Bank research that the US model of a public corporation exists primarily in more mature

countries such as the United States and Canada, Australia, Japan, etc. As a consequence, we should be researching other forms of organisation and corporate life such as mutuals, co-ops and social enterprises, which occur in many emerging markets. These forms of organisation focus on creating good outcomes for a broad range of stakeholders rather than just wealth creation for shareholders.

The challenge for business schools is clearly to redefine their purpose (Thomas, 2017). Typically, in many current programmes students are taught that the purpose of management is to promote the value of markets and maximise their returns at the expense of others.

We therefore need a wider set of perspectives to improve narrow Western models of capitalism. In terms of inclusive growth and capitalism, it is clear that in the ten years since the global financial crisis, growth has stalled, productivity is largely static, innovation rates are falling and new business formation is moderate at best. There is a growing sense that the current model of market capitalism has failed to deliver better living standards for significant sectors of society while creating much greater corporate power. It requires significant modification and change. It appears also that we are at an inflection point in the organisation of capitalism, and the direction that we may take in the future is perhaps towards a more balanced mix of capitalism and democratic socialism.

We note that significant effort is clearly being directed to develop more responsible schools for business and management, which we believe should be anchored around objectives of liberal management education and inclusive growth. Indeed, liberal education models advocate that instead of focussing narrowly on specific management and analytic skills, the humanities and social sciences should be the anchors in broadening the curriculum and learning objectives of a management education alongside courses in specific management topics.

In our view, management education is an important component of first-rate universities and higher education. As long as business is at the heart of a global society, it should be at the heart of a global university. However, as stated earlier, rather than focussing solely on the technical management skills, management education should also endorse the humanities and the breadth of social sciences as foundations of the curriculum.

Therefore, our collaborative work in this volume has arisen from our deep involvement in enhancing the liberal management education model, which is the basis of the core curriculum of all undergraduate programmes at SMU. Indeed, our prior experience has been mainly in undergraduate (UG) business education. However, it should be noted

that UG business education provides the largest UG major in both the United Kingdom and the United States. UG business education also dwarfs traditional postgraduate management education. UG business education is therefore arguably a much more significant place to intervene in the education of future managers than postgraduate programmes.

Our collaboration arises from our experience of the adoption of liberal management education models not only in Singapore but also in the United States, particularly during Howard's deanship at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. We have been inspired in our study by the work of Anne Colby and her colleagues (2011) in an important report of undergraduate business education in the United States sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation and the Aspen Institute. One of the main conclusions of her study is that the liberal arts tradition is in danger of being lost and usurped by a business school curriculum that has become too narrow and technical.

We believe strongly in the role of liberal management education in enhancing responsible, holistic and balanced education at all levels of the business school. Hence, we have spent the last four years explaining the logic of liberal management education. In developing this book we argue that students (whether undergraduate or postgraduate) exposed to the humanities (such as arts, culture, history, literature and philosophy) are much better prepared to develop their capabilities in areas such as moral and ethical reasoning and critical thinking, which are growing in importance to society. In essence, they become much more rounded, responsible and flexible global citizens.

We have enjoyed collaborating on this book and hope that you find our ideas and arguments interesting and insightful.

## Acknowledgements

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This book has arisen primarily from our broad set of experiences as academics in management education and our continued interaction with students, individuals and professional organisations in the field.

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There are also many individuals and collaborators who have influenced Howard's thinking and insight about management education. Charlies Handy, Peter Moore and Jim Ball at London Business School; the late Howard Raiffa and Paul Vatter at Harvard Business School; Ken MacCrimmon and Danny Kahneman at UBC, Vancouver; Venkat Venkatraman at BU and MIT; Sumantra Ghoshal at MIT, INSEAD and LBS; Dipak Jain and the late Dan Jacobs at the Kellogg School at Northwestern; Bob Berdahl, Larry Faulkner, Fred Neumann, Joe Porac and Jagdish Sheth at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; and Mike Shattock, Andrew Pettigrew, Robin Wensley, John McGee, David Wilson, Amanda Goodall, Lucio Sarno and David VandeLinde at Warwick University. Of course, he would also like to thank his colleagues at Singapore Management University, whom he will acknowledge further shortly.

It is also important to recognise the value and openness of the dialogue and debate that takes place between deans and also journalists in the management education community. In the latter category, Della Bradshaw, recently retired from the *Financial Times*, stands out as a wonderful and warm commentator on our field. Among deans to acknowledge, there are far too many individuals to note. However, Howard is extremely grateful for the support and counsel of Michael Page (Bentley), Michel Patry (HEC Montréal), John Kraft (Florida), Andy Policano (UCI, Irvine), David Schmittlein (MIT Sloan) and Ken Freeman and Susan Fournier (Questrom School, Boston University) in North America; George Benwell (former dean at Otago, NZ), Lin Zhao (Shanghai Jiao Tong, China), Ryuji Konishi (Tokyo, Japan) and Hiro Kono (Japan) in Asia; Peter Lorange (CEIBS, Europe), Santiago Iñiguez de Onzoño (IE, Madrid, Spain), Alfons Saquet (ESADE, Spain), Jordi Canals and Carlos Cavallé (IESE, Spain) and Johan Roos (Hult, Sweden) in Europe; Kai Peters (Ashridge and Coventry), Heather McLaughlin (Coventry), Simon Collinson (Birmingham) and Sharon Mavin (Newcastle) in the United Kingdom; Nicola Kleyn (GIBS, South Africa), Nick Binedell (GIBS, South Africa), Daneel van Lill (University of Johannesburg, South Africa), Enase Okonedo (Lagos, Nigeria), Ali Elquammah (AABS, Morocco) and Thami Ghorfi (ESCA, Morocco) in Africa; and finally Gabriela Alvarado (ITAM, Mexico) and Fernando D'Alessio (Centrum) in Latin America deserve special thanks and gratitude. Howard would also like to thank former doctoral students such as Alex Wilson (Loughborough) and Julie Davies (Huddersfield) for their continued help and collaboration.

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Associate Dean Michelle Lee is also a coauthor of many of Howard's papers and books about the evolution of global management education. Tom Estad, who is now at the University of Rochester in the United States, collaborated with us on an earlier version of Chapter 2.

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