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ESSAYS

Management as a Regulated Profession

An Essay

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The history of management education shows the rigor and relevance gap has been around for centuries, well before its appearance in the United States. Nor is it peculiar to management. It is neither germane to our discipline's present difficulties nor an appropriate focus for our critics. Rather, history suggests we finally parted company with managers after the 1959 Ford and Carnegie reports, as we presumed rationality alone was the sufficient basis for understanding them and their doings. They helped us turn management education into a profession even as management itself has yet to become one. To return closer to managers, the author suggests rationality captures one dimension of their practice, whereas the notion of business as an art form might capture its complement. Reformed art education, covering art's history, aesthetics, criticism, and production, provides a framework for studying the managerial art, and leads us to a rich, dynamic theory of the firm.

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Are we really happy when otherwise friendly people ask us, "How can you think business an academic discipline?" Suspecting us of science envy, they drive the spike deeper, agreeing that economics is a discipline founded on fundamental axioms and susceptible to rigorous analysis, and asking us about business's axioms and what our research reveals. As we labor over these matters, we cannot but be concerned by the many critiques circulating in our industry—Mintzberg's (2004) new "Managers Not MBAs," Pfeffer and Fong's (2002, 2004) articles in the *Journal of Management Studies* and *Academy of Management Executive*, Clark's (2004) discussion of managerial fads, the work of Starkey and his colleagues (Starkey, Hatchuel, & Tempest, 2004; Starkey & Tempest, n.d.), or the reports from Zimmerman and the DeAngelos (DeAngelo, DeAngelo, & Zimmerman, 2005; Zimmerman, 2001), which made the pages of our own *Chronicle of Higher Education*. There is the punishing piece by Bennis and O'Toole (2005) in *Harvard Business Review* (*HBR*), that bastion of satisfaction with business schools and what they do, that recalls Linder and Smith's (1992) earlier *HBR* piece. So what are we really doing, and

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whom do we serve? And on what basis, other than sheer opportunism? Are we doing more than selling prayer wheels to those visiting the temples of capitalism?

This essay turns on the idea of management as a profession—a group of people whose practice is shaped by training and credentialing against a proven and rigorous body of knowledge (Abbott, 1988; Haskell, 2000). Business schools exist, we say, to provide business professionals with what they need for their skilled practice. We imply a body of knowledge about which we are expert. In other professions, such as medicine, the practitioners' knowledge is regulated by associations such as the American Medical Association or the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education. These often leverage their influence via government demands for professional credentials. Management has a long history of trying to establish itself as a profession and securing similar influence (Light, 1983; Lowell, 1923; Metcalf, 1927). We like to say that business school researchers produce appropriate professional knowledge and our teachers deliver it as they professionalize managers into its application. But it may not be that simple. Some of the critiques are about the way the knowledge is delivered; others are attacks on the body of knowledge itself. Pfeffer (1993) was far from alone in his appeal for increased disciplinary rigor, for some argue there is no rigorous body of managerial knowledge from which to teach and so no argument for management as a profession.

So I begin my essay with two points. First, these criticisms are not new; they have been around for decades. Nor are they specific to management education. Jarausch's (1982) book *The Transformation of Higher Learning 1860–1930* shows similar problems in engineering, medicine, the law, the clergy, and so forth. Most critics, a distinguished line of Academy of Management presidents among them (Hambrick, 1994; Huff, 2000; Mowday, 1997; Pearce, 2004), point to the gap between theory and practice, arguing that business school knowledge relates poorly to the practicing managers' needs (French & Grey, 1996; Grey, 2001; Starkey & Madan, 2001; Weick, 2001). But if this gap is a persistent feature of professional education, as Jarausch suggests, it may be a mistake to think we either can or even should make it go away.

My second point is that management may be the very antithesis of the use of a body of rigorous professional knowledge. Many writers, including Boettinger (1975), De Pree (1989), Mintzberg (1976), Hancock (2005), and Hatch, Kostera, and Kozminski (2005), point to management as an art form. Although management obviously has creative and aesthetic aspects, I want to take this idea to its logical conclusion—to question our community's uncritical commitment to rationalism and "objective" decision making. Economics appears to be a discipline precisely because it starts from and remains bound by the axiom of rationality. Clearly, much of our theorizing apes economics in this respect, but how well does it inform us about the practice of management? Managerial practice is seldom conducted under the conditions of perfect information that we presume in our theories and classrooms. So, even if there were an appropriate body of rigorous knowledge, there would be problems relating it to the circumstances under which managers actually work. Simon (1947) told us this more than 50 years ago, but we have done little about it. We continue to teach and theorize as if managers operate under the conditions of certainty to which rationality can be applied. It is this assertion, clearly inappropriate, that drives the deepest wedges between our teaching and their practice.

But management education is also a huge and successful industry. Pfeffer and Fong's papers (2002, 2004) give us good numbers. Business schools employ thousands of people all over the world. More than 100,000 MBAs are awarded annually in the United States, and tens of thousands are awarded elsewhere. There are more thousands of executive and undergraduate business degrees, diplomas, and certificates being awarded, too. There is big money to be made, not only in delivering business education but also in our industry's supporting activities such as management texts and magazines, the provision of online resources, and building fancy new business schools.

Yet, we are uneasy. Hambrick (1994) queried if we really mattered. So, will the business of business education continue to expand, given today's declining MBA applications? What about the supply of business school faculty, given our declining doctoral programs? Can ethics fit in? What is happening with management education in China and India? Most of the published criticism is United States–based, suggesting the problems are uniquely American. The mythology has it that management education was invented in the United States at Dartmouth, or Harvard, or Wharton, around the turn of the last century, and the U.S. schools can show us how management education should be done. This ignores the facts.

A direct line of parentage to these U.S. schools runs from the German Cameralist schools, such as those at the University of Halle or the University of Frankfurt-am-Oder, which appointed their first professors of commercial economics in 1727 (Forrester, 1990; Liedman & Persson, 1992). Though these faculty members were not titled professor of business this or that, the syllabi are remarkably familiar. Redlich (1949, 1957) and others (Chandler & Redlich, 1961; Engwall & Zamagni, 1998; Fehling, 1926, 1928; Lindenfeld, 1997; Locke, 1996, 1998; Meyer, 1998; Pieper, 1990; Small, 1969) tell us about the evolution of the German schools. The American story does not pick up until almost two centuries later through the contributions of Quaker philanthropists such as Wharton, Tuck, and Cornell (Meyer, 1998, p. 31), though there were business schools at the Universities of Louisiana and Wisconsin in the early 1850s (Engwall & Zamagni, 1998). The Harvard Business School was founded in 1907 by Edwin Gay on his return from the Cameralist school in Berlin, where he gained his PhD in economics (Heaton, 1968). Likewise, Wharton's school, despite being founded in 1881 and initially operated by Joseph Wharton himself, was really shaped by Edmund James on his return from his PhD studies at the University of Halle (Sass, 1982).

Note that aside from James's influence from 1885 onwards, Wharton was a trained metallurgist who spoke and read German, had visited Prussia several times, and admired their social welfare system. He also saw that their business education was on what was then termed "a scientific basis" (Sass, 1982). Relatedly, Woodrow Wilson, later U.S. president, received his PhD at Johns Hopkins, a university founded explicitly on the Cameralist model. Shortly after graduating, he published an influential paper arguing that the Cameralist methods adopted in the German public sector could prove powerful in the United States (Wilson, 1887). In short, we cannot really understand the American business school without reference to its Cameralist parentage or the strikingly successful German university-based research tradition of the 19th and 20th centuries.

But these Germans did not invent management education either. The earliest collegiate management education I am aware of is a program in estate management taught at Oxford in the mid-1300s (Richardson, 1940). Again, the syllabus seems amazingly familiar. There were early schools in Paris, Lisbon, and in Belgium and Italy, too, and it is notable that the Latin countries led the rest of Europe (Engwall & Zamagni, 1998, p. 6). The first purpose-built business school in Europe was that created by Marquis Pombal in Lisbon after the 1755 earthquake. We have only to think of counting sticks or granary management in ancient Mesopotamia, or the amphora trails left on the seabed by the sailors in the Greek wine supply chain as they drank their way around the Mediterranean, to appreciate how old administration and administrative education must be.

There is a long history of criticism, too. Redlich, Lindenfeld, and Meyer trace the evolution of management education in Germany and the emerging gap between theory and practice—and that between the university schools and the *Handelshochschulen* and *Fachhochschulen* (Meyer, 1998). Redlich (1957) tells of the 19th-century German steel town that, its business failing, pressed the local business school principal to take charge. The business failed anyway, and he was put in jail—where he died—to ponder the gap between rigor and relevance. Deans beware! The bottom line is that by the mid-1800s, these European business schools were already under pressure to confront the treacherous gap between teaching and professional practice that we see today—it is not just an American issue, nor just of our times. Indeed, with the convergence of management education in Europe and America, it is clearly a global issue (Boal & Hirsch, 2004; Locke & Schone, 2004; McGlade, 1998).

Thoughtful critics appreciate that the gap is partly internal to academe and the business schools' urge to legitimate their management scholarship against the other disciplines; hence, their faculty's need to publish in academic journals to secure promotion and tenure. There is a clear tension here between the dictates of the discipline, the needs of managers, and the politics of the university. As deans know all too well, dealing with this calls for an in-the-middleness that Merton and Barber (1976) label *social ambivalence*—the practice of marching well to different drummers. Others, such as Pfeffer and Fong (2002), suggest the gap is due to poor teaching and that we should emulate the teaching of physics. Mintzberg (2004) wonders if we are teaching the wrong people the wrong things in the wrong way, whereas Grey (2004) argues that the gap arises because we ignore power and class and the business school's place in sustaining the status quo. Rather than analyze and contrast these explanations, I want to use the notion of management as an art form to point directly to our assumptions about rationality and its place in managerial knowledge.

Business schools prosper for reasons we seem not to understand too well, so we may be too hasty if we assume that fixing the theory/practice gap is going to make things better. The management education business is healthy and expanding in spite of our anxieties. John Fernandes (2005), the president of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), recently pronounced,

> The MBA is still the most popular, most flexible, and most successful degree in the world. Our job is to keep it that way. After all, we are providing our graduates with the "liberal arts of life," and a guarantee of the tools needed for life-long success.

A valued American saying is "if it ain't broke, don't fix it," and this probably applies to management education, too. We can do no better than look at Mintzberg's 2004 book to find a thorough discussion of what else might be fixable. Some find his work idiosyncratic, but there is a wealth of hard evidence, research, and incisive thought here grounded on a lifelong commitment to making management education better. But with due respect, I feel his book fails to grasp a key issue.

This is pivotal, so I should make myself completely clear. The notion of a profession is not only about there being a rigorous shared body of knowledge that shapes practice; it is also about its possession and the resulting monopoly power. It is about professional politics and social movements. To illustrate: The U.S. medical associations are more or less able to dictate what counts as medical knowledge in America and what does not. Note also the crucial division of labor between the medical research schools and labs that produce this knowledge, and the medical practitioners who apply it. The professional associations regulate the entry of people into the profession—and the entry of knowledge, too. Using these devices and practices, the profession effectively owns its knowledge and the relevant generation and application processes. When it comes to our special topic, management, there is no corresponding professional body, no corresponding people and knowledge processes. There are management associations, of course, thousands of them, such as the U.S. Chambers of Commerce, the National Business Association, the National Women's Business Council, the National Small Business Association, the American Management Association (AMA), and so forth, but they are not party to the credentialing processes in the way partly achieved, for instance, by the U.K.'s Chartered Management Institute.

Many in business schools say the division of labor between our researchers and our managerial clients is working—we develop the knowledge, they apply it. But if we look honestly at the journals in which we display our research results, and at what has changed managerial practice over the years, where do we see the great stories that stand alongside, say, the invention of penicillin, National Health, the joint stock company, or even traffic management systems? As Starkey et al. (2004) put it diplomatically, "New business models have never been created in the academy." On the contrary, the important recent business innovations such as 6-sigma, the Boston Consulting Group strategic matrix, lean manufacturing, pension benefits, junk bonds, and so forth all came from without. So if our research contribution does not compare favorably with that of the medical or engineering schools, what is our place in the world? Do we contribute anything to management's professionalization?

There are competing theories about why business schools exist. One is the oft-repeated research story above. Another is that business schools provide a forum for the exchange and diffusion of the best managerial practices. These are generated in innovating organizations, a variation on the research story that treats those as the locus of new knowledge and stresses the resulting value of bringing their managers together in an educational setting (Starkey et al., 2004). Other ideas are more cynical; business schools are executive boot camps in which a self-selected group of aggressive individuals are put through a career-shaping credentialing race. There is the wimp corporation theory—rather than select their own leaders, organizations outsource to the reputational hot list in *Business Week* or the *Financial Times* (*FT*). There is the finishing-school theory, wherein a group of students is preferred by reason of class network socially and get equipped to maintain the status quo. There is the argument found in Locke's (1996; Locke & Schone, 2004) critiques, or in Livingston's (1971) *HBR* article, "The Myth of the Well-Educated Manager," that business schools might actually have damaged the economy. Incidentally, this particular story goes back well beyond Flexner's 1907 report on U.S. professional education, the first of the Carnegie reports that have so influenced what we do (Light, 1983).

One of the deep mysteries of our industry is that it does not seem to matter which of these explanations is true—if any. Without really understanding our place in the system, or the value we add, we are hugely successful and show no real signs of failing to be so. Relieved, most of us just press on with business. But I would not be bothering you with this essay if, like Mintzberg, I did not think there was something useful to be said.

Let us consider the possibility that management might be better understood from an entirely different point of view—as an art form. Victorians such as Ruskin believed art should be entirely without commercial value, indeed, without definite purpose. To suggest that management might be an art form is not to deny that that it might be purposive. Given our capitalist context, artists generally display an awareness of the nature and fickleness of the art market and have to learn how to succeed within it. From the time of ancient Greeks or the Medicis, art has been about patronage and business. But at the same time, the most influential and successful art is made and consumed in ways that cannot be described or explained by rational analysis or deduction from some prior goal or purpose.

The point of my art metaphor is to contrast rational decision making against intuitive construction, to suggest that it might be more useful to think of business leadership as something other than cold, objective reasoning (Mintzberg, 1976). If management is an art form, it is probably the most significant one in today's complex societies—given its pervasive impact on our lives. Politics is an art form, too, but in today's long run there is a case to be made that economics trumps politics. After all, everything we have and do depends on our organizations as engines of wealth and social order, and these have to be managed. Recall that Simon (1991) told us we are a society of organizations, not of markets.

So I note a paradox. Those who read Luhmann (1995), or even Kuhn (1970), will recall the centrality of paradox. We think about management as a profession, and our role in providing the body of knowledge on which it stands, and about our regulating access by credentialing aspirants as masters of that knowledge. But here's the paradox: While trying to professionalize management, we actually professionalized ourselves. We have a precisely regulated body of knowledge—look at our publication norms—and access to our profession is regulated by research degrees and university slots. We have vigorous professional institutions such as the Academy of Management, the Association for Information Systems, and the European Federation of Management Development relating our knowledge and teaching practices.

Accreditation reinforces these connections. Four hundred thirty of America's 3,500-plus business schools and a further 74 non-American schools around the world are currently accredited by the AACSB. Although this seems a small proportion of the total, there is a heavy halo effect and the process's influence is far wider. Accreditation hinges on measuring the professionalization of the faculty along the Cameralist dimensions outlined in Simon's (1967) paper on the design of business schools (Revans, 1967). Though the AACSB's declared mission is to "support excellence in management education," much of accreditation's impact is about branding and how potential students and recruiters value the credential. Faculty's research work scarcely enters the picture. The publication process strongly favors the rigorously irrelevant over the unrigorously relevant, so furthering the divide between theory and practice. But here is paradox again: We feel more professionalized by this rather than less. On a personal note, I regret the current tendency in European schools that, feeling pressure to gain AACSB accreditation, now force this brand of professionalism on their doctoral students and faculty. One result, I fear, is the disappearance of fieldwork and the business involvement that marked European research for centuries, a tradition within which I also worked. But who can resist this reputational imperative, given accreditation is more and more a determinant of student and recruiter choice in a worldwide market and business schools are more and more obliged to run as competitive global businesses?

The rankings add materially to this pressure and now determine many a business school's academic strategy (DeAngelo et al., 2005). We complain about how the rankings are done, yet run our schools to better our score. There are evident pathologies here—for the scores may be neither controllable nor properly represent the quality of the institution's educational product. Trying to raise one's ranking probably means diverting scarce resources to image and brand management, to facilities that make students happy rather than better qualified, and most cynical of all, to pleasuring the recruiters. Mintzberg (2004, p. 78) excerpts Policano's tongue-in-cheek advice on "how to fix your rankings," none of it having much connection to the theory/practice gap, nor to faculty's research or publications.

We might go back to our history again and see the professionalization of professional education is not new (Haskell, 2000). The American Social Sciences

Association (ASSA) was founded in Boston in 1865, shortly after the Civil War, to bring academics and businesspeople together and so hasten postwar recovery. It was modeled on the British National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (Ross, 1991). In 1870, Joseph Wharton read them a paper on international industrial competition (Sass, 1982). But commerce was awkwardly placed in the ASSA, and in 1885, Edmund James, just back from Germany with his PhD and now helping Wharton set up his school, joined two American economists from his doctoral class to set up the American Economic Association (AEA; Sass, 1982). Their intention was to introduce the historical and statistical Cameralist approach and so open up the study of U.S. economic policy to rigorous study. It was also a move to professionalize the academic economists' community. The success of the AEA led the leading U.S. business schools to set up the AACSB (then the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business) in 1916 to bring a similar Cameralist rigor and method to the study of business and thereby regulate the emerging business schools and protect their body of knowledge.

As Mintzberg shows, the Cameralist research message carried clear through to Carnegie Mellon's 1950's adoption of the rational decision-making model under Dean Bach, the 1959 Carnegie and Ford Foundation reports he helped write (Gordon & Howell, 1959; Pierson et al., 1959), and to Simon's (1967) paper. The long-term strategic objective was to capture the academic high ground, on the way discrediting the earlier national system of "commercial schools," such as the Hamilton and LaSalle institutes, the U.S.'s *Handelshochschulen* (Sass, 1982). The universities were greedy for this business—in precisely the same way the history of 19th-century U.S. medical education shows the universities successfully wiped out the burgeoning commercial medical schools (Jarausch, 1982).

Without delving further into this history, we can get some sense of how our industry—management education—got to be so professionalized. Now let's go back to consider the professionalization of management and wonder who might really own its knowledge, given that we business schoolers clearly do not. There is a parallel here to the rankings. We feel unease precisely because we do not own and control that knowledge. We find *Business Week*, the *FT*, and *U.S. News* creating and owning knowledge that business recruiters and prospective students use to shape *our* behavior as well as their own. Who else might actually own or control the knowledge managers use? In the United States, we are agog with Enron, Martha Stewart, Safety-Kleen, and WorldCom. In Europe there is Parmalat. There is nothing new about "creative accounting," white-collar fraud, or executive crime, but there is progress. I do not refer to the ethics courses now effectively mandated by AACSB. More relevant is the 2002 Sarbanes-Oxley Act, named for the two politicians, a Democratic senator and a Republican congressman, who pushed it through. Though many think it much less than needed, it has clearly had considerable effect in making corporate accounting more transparent and so forcing that profession to better protect the public.

Now we are at the second pivotal point in the argument. The first was about power and the ownership of professional knowledge rather than about abstract notions of a "relevance gap." My second point is about context and the realities of control by those beyond both management and shareholders, about understanding that the public, through the governmental and legislative processes, can constrain executive behavior. A profession's power is always so constrained, as was the medieval guild's by the king or the local baronetcy (Coleman, 1974). This suggests the deeper struggle over the ownership of professional knowledge is ultimately between the firm or organization and the public. Secrecy sustains monopolistic abuses and executive crime, transparency moves managerial knowledge to the public. Of course, Veblen (1965) reminded us there can be no business without monopoly, so the strategic question is always how effectively this is constrained by others (Porter, 1979).

We can also see a more general methodological point, one at the heart of Cameralism. If we read the history of corporate law, say Commons's (1924) *Legal Foundations of Capitalism* or Horwitz's (1992) *Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860*, we see the overall character of managerial practice is generally an adaptive or opportunistic response to the situation's legal constraints (threats and opportunities). Hedge funds are not facts of nature, they are our imaginative inventions, responses to the needs and opportunities of a complex of interlocking but incompletely integrated financial and legal systems. Likewise, the actual practices, and legal and historical idiosyncrasies, of our financial markets shape managements' real options. CEOs watch their share price for many reasons; it shapes their relationships with stockholders and bankers and might also shape their bonuses. But it also constrains their strategic opportunities, such as to take over other companies. Likewise, the Fed's management of interest rates and money supply constrains choice. But where in our business school strategy courses do we now demand empirical study of the legal or financial opportunities, or even the industry's history, as key to strategic analysis? The 5-force diagram does not help us here (Porter, 1980).

So, to study practicing management's knowledge and to solve the puzzle about who owns it, we must study the inventory of real constraints to management's practice. Such attention to context was the basis of the original Cameralist methodology—at the core, for instance, of Commons's "old" institutional theorizing. But it has now been largely lost to our research practice and even our thinking under the press of the post-Foundation Report rationalism. If we want to close the relevance gap, we might do well to correct this imbalance between axiom-based theorizing and the empirical study of constraints over entrepreneurship and so develop a more contextualized notion of managerial knowledge. But rather than delve into the history of how and why this loss occurred, and into how it affects our protoprofession, I want to turn to what might be done about it and how that might reshape the relationship between business schools and practitioners.

First, we know there are strategic constraints other than the social and legal ones mentioned above, or the ones Porter suggests. Some are psychological, reflecting our perceiving and valuing; there are also our personal learned and tacit ways of responding to the situations in which we find ourselves. Business, as Shackle (1972) and others reminded us, is about expectations, not predictions. There are, or are not, the constraints of moral values, social needs, public goods policies, and so forth. There are also the physical and technological constraints we note especially when they change, as when transistors replaced vacuum tubes and so radically transformed communication and computing, or as ocean freight turned to containers. Here, I allude to the three knowledge universes we seem to inhabit, finding ourselves at an intersection, so to speak, of disparate psychological, social, and physical universes. Some might recall similar speculations in *The Functions of the Executive* by Simon's mentor Chester Barnard (1938).

Second, if analyzing these contextual constraints is key to understanding the knowledge that managers actually apply, what can we say that is generalized, theoretical, that reaches beyond the specifics of these constraints? I seem to have backed myself into a relativist corner denying the very possibility of a stable body of professional knowledge. Again, those who read Luhmann (1995) or even Giddens (1984) will sense where I am headed. I am saying there is no possibility of us ever knowing—in a useful, practice- relevant way—the context of managerial choice except from the viewpoint of the managers acting within it. To think there is a more objective knowing, such as a physicist or economist might wish for, is to miss that they too only "know" through their practice. There is no decontextualized but still practice-relevant knowledge. What philosophers call the God's eye view is irrelevant to us. "Bounded rationality" is Simon's realization of this. Yet, in our teaching and theorizing we still insist we can know organizational and economic matters in this objective way. It is this presumption that so separates us from managers whose responsibilities oblige them to act from within their bounded rationality. They are forced to attend to the constraints that define their context, for those ultimately define the sum of what can be known.

To get us—or rather me—out of this relativistic corner, let me flip back to the idea of management as an art form rather than the skilled implementation of an externally warranted or regulated body of objective knowledge. High art is what it is precisely because it eschews the objective God's-eye representations sought by science. Art is about the way our imaginations confront the perceptual, emotional, moral, social, and technological constraints of our time (Alberti, 1991). Hatch et al. (2005) remind us that art is creative in the way it speaks to and challenges us and thereby becomes part of the social processes that act on and so change these constraints. Ofili's elephant-dung picture of the Virgin Mary caused an uproar in New York that continued a rethinking of public financing for the arts—precipitated by earlier disputes over funding by the National Endowment for the Arts. Art's continuing challenge to our taken-for-granted constraints helps us understand, for instance, how Japanese textbooks might trigger riots in China or, going back a few years, how a novel might lead to a *fatwah* on Salman Rushdie.

My argument is that management may be more about the exercise of the managerial imagination, as it confronts these real internal and external constraints, than about the application of a rigorous body of professional knowledge. I am not sayi science and rationality are irrelevant to managers, far from it, or that medicine's or engineering's regulated knowledge bases are entirely objective. Rather, I want to question the balance between managerial creativity and their rigorous knowledge use and what this implies for management education. Professions such as medicine and engineering are clearly tilted toward regulation, toward protecting the public from wayward practitioners, with a structural division of labor between those that generate professional knowledge but do not apply it and those who apply it but do not generate it. Their profession-shaping associations regulate the knowledge traffic between them. We need our surgeons, architects, and aerospace engineers to employ proven procedures and not be overly creative. But management may be rather different. The book racks at the airports remind us that innovation and entrepreneurship rule. We want our managers to be creative rather than bureaucratic rule followers. And if art rather than rational decision making is to be our metaphor, is there anything relevant we can learn from art education?

Higher art education is a profession that parallels our own in many ways. It has also been around a long time. The Paris École (Académie) des Beaux-Arts was founded in 1648 as a school for the painters decorating the French nobility's palaces. Over the years, it evolved greatly but was eventually re-formed into today's public educational institution by Napoleon III. The traditional Beaux-Arts education called for a huge amount of disciplined work from students; years of studying prior art and drawing "in the flat" before you could work "in the round"—as lawyers also say—let alone use colored paints. But by the mid-1800s, the Beaux-Arts tradition had become theoretically sterile. Surprise! A gulf opened up between the institution's teaching and what new artists wanted to present and what a newly industrializing society wanted to see. The school, controlling access to the Salon, found itself no longer able to regulate the profession. There was a violent paradigm shift, precipitated by Napoleon III's enabling the artists we now call the Impressionists to show their work at the 1863 Salon des Refusées.

Higher art education has gone through many cycles since that time. A recent paradigm shift, a move away from the previous phase of undisciplined self-expression now seen as an excuse to let students run wild in the studio, is to discipline-based art education (DBAE; Smith, 2000). Students now study hard to enter their chosen profession. They take four kinds of courses: art history, aesthetics, art criticism, and the production of art. The first two focus on learning to see and comprehend the social, historical, political, and technological constraints on art. Students then better understand the constraints of the present and are better equipped to search out the contradictions, anomalies, and opportunities that are the pathways to future art. Art criticism develops language, community, and an intellectual vantage point from which they can observe and theorize their own work as well as that of others. The production of art is where their creative talent collides with the physical constraints of the media they choose—and artistic technology and practice evolves. As students respond to these constraints, they push toward new artistic knowledge as it affects and is reflected by the community's critiques of their work. We see a shift from rigorous theories that pretend a kind of objectivity, the pseudoscience that got the Academie des Beaux-Arts into such difficulty, toward a focus on the community's evaluation of the artist's responses to the time's changing constraints. The same shift was already evident in the Bauhaus tradition (Volkmann & De Cock, 2005). We might note that researchers in creativity and developmental education are moving in the same direction, away from a study of the individual's psychology and toward an analysis of how their imagination interacts with their context and the constraints over its application (Sawyer et al., 2003).

What should we conclude? Management education has professionalized—perhaps to a pathological degree—around quasiscientific research methods and a regulated body of knowledge visibly distant from that which managers use. Yet, as the AACSB's current president reminds us, this has not hindered our commercial success. Quite to the contrary, our industry's expansion across the world is rapid and continuing. But at the same time, it seems our value proposition is more in what we do than in what we know, more in our credentialing and socialization activities rather than in our research. Just how and why and for how long this is a sustainable strategy is a matter of speculation, perhaps an area of management we have not yet dared research. But perhaps it does not matter—when conditions really change we shall adapt accordingly. Perhaps.

So, should we just think business as usual or really do something about this state of affairs? Perhaps we should think reflexively and apply our own imaginations to our own contextual constraints. Our situation is obviously shaped by how we add value to the socioeconomy—even if we do not fully understand it. Some analysts focus on the competition from corporate universities, from nontraditional institutions such as the University of Phoenix or Capella, or from the consultancies. Remember, these organizations are not constrained by the system of professionalization we have put in place for ourselves; their degrees of freedom and constraint differ from ours. Nor is their value proposition the same. Which industry recipe will prosper? Which will go the way of the dodo? Times change, and just as the U.S. commercial colleges and the old-style *Handelshochschulen* disappeared, our value proposition, and today's top business schools, might also pass away (Parker, 2002). The 100 years since the founding of the American business school is but a short chapter in the history of business education. Right now, credentialing sells. But an increasing number of executives tell us they prefer to hire liberal arts graduates or PhD physicists. They find them adaptive and creative, whereas the MBAs' imaginations seem calcified by irrelevant—but rigorous—theory and questionable ethical attitudes. Can we re-imagine management as a community of creative professionals analogous to the global community of artists? Could there be a form of education well shaped for that profession? My answer is an emphatic yes, and its core must be about the practice-based interplay of context and imagination. Observe how the École des Beaux-Arts survived to compete with leading schools like Cal Arts, and that the DBAE movement plays directly to their disciplined tradition.

Education for creativity in the real world is not about free expression, "whacks on the side of the head," or other irresponsibilities, it is about the seriously hard work of understanding, operationalizing, and sometimes transcending the constraints to the imagination. To think "out of the box" and get beyond its constraints, we must know them first. It turns out that such knowing is not mere knowledge of acquaintance, it is an experientially gained knowing about or know-how (James, 1950; Ryle, 1949). The hard work necessary to gain managerial knowledge leads to a deep knowing that is both context specific and context defining, and for that reason is readily brought into contact with the needs of those others that share and whose practices co-constitute that context. At the same time, denied the pseudo-objectivity and moral neutrality of our business school abstractions, hard-working students will discover for themselves the important legal and ethical constraints to their imaginings, realizing the defining institutional apparatus of their context.

But can I speak so glibly of art as a profession? We see no scientific body of art knowledge, no division of knowledge labor between researchers and users, no institutions regulating or constraining the knowledge flow. Yet, my inclination is a tentative "yes." We do not do much violence to our established ideas to suggest that the essence of a profession is not its shared body of objective knowledge nor its policing institutions but rather that community's self-conscious reflecting on the constraints against which the trained imagination is thrown. Perhaps, at bottom, a profession is a group sufficiently disciplined, communicative, and reflexive to know itself as a community of considered practice. To reach this degree of self-perception and understanding requires serious hard work, serious commitment to the profession, serious pushing at the limits to professional practice, and serious consideration of its impact on others. Come to think of it, that sounds like a pretty good description of management as a profession—one shaped by creative interaction with society's diverse and changing needs rather than by an inward-looking and theory-invested institution such as management education.

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