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Citation: Spicer, A., Jaser, Z. & Wiertz, C. (2021). The future of the business school: finding hope in alternative pasts. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 20(3), pp. 459-466. doi: 10.5465/amle.2021.0275

This is the accepted version of the paper.

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Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/26313/>

Link to published version: <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2021.0275>

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**THE FUTURE OF THE BUSINESS SCHOOL:
FINDING HOPE IN ALTERNATIVE PASTS**

André Spicer, Bayes Business School (formerly Cass), City, University of London

Zahira Jaser, Sussex Business School, University of Sussex

Caroline Wiertz, Bayes Business School (formerly Cass), City, University of London

INTRODUCTION

One would be forgiven for feeling a sense of hopelessness after reading what has been written about Business Schools recently. We are told that business schools are irrelevant and useless (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005), have little impact on people's career prospects (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002, 2004), encourage ethically dubious practices (Khurana, 2010), incentivise 'nonsense' research (Tourish, 2019), avoid important societal issues (Harley & Fleming, 2021), create a widespread malaise among faculty (Fleming, 2019, 2021) and encourage destructive managerial practices (Ghoshal, 2005). Some have even concluded that we should 'bulldoze the business school' (Parker, 2018).

Much of this recent discussion assumes there is a single model of the Business School that is completely dominated by 'neo-liberalism' (Parker, 2018; Fleming, 2021). However, historical scholarship shows this is not so. There have been – and indeed there still are – different models of the business school. These include elite 'finishing schools' such as Wharton and Harvard which were designed to develop moral character (Khurana, 2010) and foster an ethos of humanism (Bridgman, Cummings, & McLaughlin, 2016). There were interdisciplinary schools such as the Graduate Institute of Business Administration at Carnegie Institute of Technology which blurred traditional scholarly boundaries (Khurana and Spender, 2012). Then there were non-elite 'night schools' and 'trade schools' focused on a training in skills (O'Connor, 2011).

Until recently, this discussion was dominated by histories which charted the rise of the North-American business school (Tiratsoo, 2004; Parker, 2018). While important, this narrative obscures a much more complex history of different models of business education around the world. In Britain, for instance, there were a range of different kinds of business education which came before the emergence of the American style business school in Britain in 1966 (Pollard, 1968; Locke, 1989; Keeble, 1992; Wilson, Thomson & Thomson, 2006). Uncovering these early different models might provide a resource for rethinking business education in Britain – and beyond. In this piece, we will briefly revisit five early models of business education. These are the Colonial School,

the Workers School, the Civic School, the Management Movement, and the Collegiate School (see table 1). Re-engaging with these models provides not just a better understanding of the history of British business education. It also renews our hope for a plurality of futures beyond the ‘neo-liberal’ business school.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The Colonial School

One of the first ‘proto-business schools’ in Britain was the East India College at Haileybury, Hertfordshire. It was founded in 1806 by the East Indian Company to educate young men (typically 16-18 years old) who were on the path to becoming ‘writers’ (career administrators; Wilkinson, 2017). The college was founded to replace patronage with meritocratic appointment and training (Tribe, 1995). Part of the ‘Whiggish’ reform movement aiming at establishing a permanent British civil service, the college provided an education with both a practical and a character-building component. New recruits were taught a mixture of law, political economy, mathematics, Indian languages and classics. This encouraged them to see themselves as ‘Englishmen’, inculcated with English values. The school explicitly set out to train ‘civil servants’, not ‘businesspeople’ or ‘managers’ (despite working for a privately held company). Trainee writers were encouraged to undertaking the work of statecraft rather than business. However they were trained in practical matters recognisable in a modern-day business school classroom.

Although the school closed in 1858, the college continued to have an influence. For instance, education in political economy developed at Haileybury formed the starting point for the development of economics education at Oxford, Cambridge and the University of London (Tribe, 1995). More recently, scholars have started to reflect on how the legacies of colonialism continue to infuse British business schools (Bousseebaa, 2020). Recognising this often-unacknowledged lineage opens up space to speak about the colonial past of British business and question models

developed in colonial centres should represent the ideal that other places should aspire towards.

Questioning these assumptions has created room for faculty working in British business schools to experiment with alternative pedagogical methods (e.g. Dar, Liu, Martinez & Brewis, 2020).

Scholars in business schools have started to imagine and implement new models of the decolonised business school (e.g., Harney & Thomas, 2020).

The Workers School

While the East India College was training colonial administrators, another form of education was developing in Britain: the Mechanics Institutes. Typically funded by local industrialists, they developed skills, improved morals and controlled the local working population (Shapin & Barnes, 1977). The first Mechanics Institutes were founded in Glasgow and Edinburgh during the 1820s. By the middle of the 19th century there were over 700 Mechanics Institutes throughout Britain. Initially they focused on teaching scientific subjects linked with local industries such as chemistry.

However, administrative subjects, such as technical drawing, reading, shorthand, and book-keeping, became important too (Pollard, 1965). Mechanics Institutes were among the earliest providers of accounting education (Hopper, Otley, Scapens, 2001). They also provided a home for the development of proto-management theory. Andrew Ure's book 'The Philosophy of Manufactures' (1967, 1835) started out as a series of lectures which were given at the Andersonian Institute in Glasgow (later the Glasgow Mechanics Institute). It later came to be seen as one of the first books of management (Kumar, 1984). Mechanics institutes also hosted courses on political economy and self-help (Fielden, 1968; Clarke, 2009). The original self-help book started life as a series of lectures given by Samuel Smiles to a Mutual Improvement Society in Leeds (a 'spin-off' institutions from Mechanics Institutes – see Radcliffe, 1997). Smiles preached the idea of individual success through self-improvement and self-reliance, and his book 'self-help' would become a best seller. It provided a kind of 'lower-middle class utopianism', feeding its uneasy petite bourgeois readers an alternative to radical political movements of the time (Morris, 1981).

During the latter part of the 19th century, Mechanics Institutes began to decline, under pressure from the rise of state provided education, technological innovation, and an increasingly complex division of labour (Whitley, Thomas, & Marceau, 1981). This split between practical skills and scientific innovation pushed many Mechanics Institutes to evolve. Some trained people for skilled working-class and lower middle-class occupations, becoming institutions of technology and eventual ‘post 1992 universities.’ Some specialised in part-time education for working adults (e.g. Birkbeck College). Still others focused on scientific education and became universities during the early to mid-20th century (e.g. UMIST, now part of the University of Manchester).

One way business schools have sought to reconnect with this history is by seeing themselves as schools for social mobility. This means seeing themselves as a ladder for people from working class backgrounds to gain access to middle class occupations. Whilst elite business schools often reproduce existing class positions (Rivera, 2016), non-elite schools have helped facilitate social mobility. For instance, state-funded non-elite colleges in the U.S. such as those in the State University of New York system are remarkably effective at facilitating social mobility from the working class to the middle class (Reber and Sinclair, 2020). If a similar pattern holds in Britain, it suggests that some non-elite business schools might find hope in seeing themselves as engines of social mobility.

The Civic School

While Mechanics Institutes were slowly transforming into technical institutes, a number of civic ‘red brick’ universities opened their doors in large industrial cities like Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Leeds. In contrast with their predecessors (The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge), red-brick institutions were more open to forming closer relationships with industry (Sanderson, 1988, 2018), the local business community, and being part of a wider project of civic improvement (Whyte, 2015). One of these redbrick universities was the University of Birmingham. Two years after the institution received its royal charter as a University, Birmingham employed

William Ashley to establish the first Department of Commerce in a UK university (Jones & Tadajewski, 2015). Ashley started as an economic historian at Oxford, spent time in Germany, then Toronto and finally Harvard University. Ashley found inspiration in the then newly founded US business schools, which informed his 1902 manifesto. His vision was to develop a commercial education targeted at ‘the officers [of business firms], those who, as principals, directors, managers, secretaries, heads of departments, etc., will ultimately guide the business activity of the country’ (Jones & Tadajewski, 2015: 9). The cap-stone course entitled ‘business policy’ and covered many issues you might find today in management, marketing and strategy courses in a contemporary business school. It also included practical aspects: visits to local businesses and guest lectures from people with knowledge of particular industries which were important in Birmingham.

Ashley’s department of commerce became the model for others at the University of Manchester (1903), Liverpool (1910), and London (1919). These were often established under the auspices of the local Chambers of Commerce. However, departments of commerce did not enjoy high levels of legitimacy with the business community and they struggled to place their students in industry (Keeble, 1992). In 1924, the London Chamber of Commerce pointed out that ‘the great majority of employers are not anxious to employ University Men or Women. They prefer to recruit their own staff at the age of sixteen or seventeen’ (Keeble, 1992: 108). In 1947, the British Federation of British Industry pointed out that ‘a B.Comm course is not appropriate for fulltime university study, and the possession of a B.Comm degree can hardly be regarded as a qualification of significant value of entry into industry’ (Keeble, 1992: 109). Despite these challenges, commerce departments continued in British Universities – often through offering joint degrees. In the mid-1960s commerce departments expanded, and rebranded themselves as ‘business schools.’ They maintained many of their early features, focusing on a more academic education rooted in other disciplines such as history and economics – with other subjects like sociology and psychology added to the list.

Some of these institutions have now started to reconnecting with the agenda of civic development and the ‘public interest’ (Ferlie, McGivern & Morale, 2010). Cardiff Business School has developed an approach which combines both purposeful action with the pursuit of the substantive goal of the public good (Kitchener & Delbridge, 2020). This reflects the deeper civic and public role which Ashley imagined for departments of commerce over a century ago. It also gives a sense of hope that business schools can play a civic role in addressing public problems.

The Movement School

While civic universities struggled to establish their legitimacy with local industrialists, another form of business education was developing outside formal educational institutions. The ‘management movement’ (Wilson et al., 2006; Maclean et al., 2020) was initially formed by a loose collection of business consultants and executives. They were influenced by the new ‘science of management’ which was taking over British industry after World War I. This movement pursued the “objective of establishing a coherent body of knowledge, operating on scientific principles, with management justifying its authority through professionalism and an ethic of service” (Wilson et al., 2006:180). It emerged from Quaker-run companies such as Rowntree and Cadburys. The management movement highlighted the ethic of professionalism, managers’ wider responsibilities, and their contribution to the well-being of the wider communities (e.g., Sheldon, 1923).

While the Management Movement was not institutionalised into a school, it did create forums of debate such as the Rowntree lectures and the Management Research Group (Maclean et al., 2020). These forums brought together important representatives from businesses throughout Britain to exchange and discuss the emerging ‘science’ of management. A key theme was that the profession of management should be imbued with higher values and provide a ‘national service’. The lectures and the Management Research Forum reflect on significant societal issues of the day such as executive pay, shareholder primacy and working conditions. At the time, “members of the management movement found themselves preaching to a largely unresponsive audience and were

sometimes driven to bitter criticism of employers for their extreme conservatism in the face of new ideas, ... and their unbending resistance to management education” (Whitley, et al., 1981: 32; see also Wilson et al., 2006). However, it also encouraged a “mentality of traditional humanism, emphasising the community, the integration of the worker, and the avoidance of conflict” (Gullien, 1994: 302).

While the Management Movement largely disappeared after World War II, it continues to speak to some contemporary debates today. The idea of ‘business as a service’ reminds us of a different vision of management which is about the pursuit of ‘higher aims’ (Maclean et al, 2020). The Management Movement also reminds us that business schools can play an important convening role. For instance, the Grand Challenges movement has aimed at re-energising business schools to “guide business leaders, employees, and stakeholders with systematic, unbiased, and empirically robust evidence on mechanisms with which to tackle the persistent, but tractable, global problems confounding us.” (George et al, 2016:1893)

The Collegiate School

One of the ideas that came out of the long policy discussions sparked by the Management Movement was the need to found a college to train of top managers. Some suggested it should be modelled on the Imperial Defense College where officers in the British Army were trained. This led to the founding of the Administrative Staff College at Henley in 1945. It was a non-profit private organisation located in a stately home just outside a wealthy home-counties market town. Henley was a residential college with comfortable facilities where ‘members’ would live onsite during the three-month course. Members came from a wide variety of backgrounds, but they already had significant experience in industry, government or banking. They would work together in syndicate groups which encouraged sharing of expertise among managers, self-learning and self-reflection (Dimock, 1956; Vernardakis, 1982). Syndicates were structured around guided debate and discussion rather than lecturing, with members taking turns in leading the syndicate group. The

College emphasised an interdisciplinary approach of ‘general management.’ For example, public policy issues were discussed alongside with management questions (Dimock, 1956). The Henley model received significant support from business leaders and proved popular among managers. It also spawned successors such as Ashridge College and was replicated in a number of former British colonies such as Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Ghana (Cornwell-Jones, 2013). Private companies also drew heavily on the Henley model to develop their own in-house management training colleges, such as the Tata companies in India (Masrani, Perriton, & McKinlay, 2018).

Although Henley was arguably the dominant model for management education from just after World War II until at least 1966, the staff college model faced significant challenges with the rise of the business school model. Eventually, Ashridge rebranded itself as a business school and later was merged with a larger privately held business school (Hult). Henley Management College merged with the University of Reading to become Henley Business School.

Although the collegiate model has largely faded, it continues to provide an alternative to the business school. The emphasis on sharing of pre-existing knowledge and self-reflective learning continues to be an important part of the practice of management education – particular for experienced executives. The collegiate model could be of inspiration for institutions which want to create more reflexive business education which is not hemmed in by disciplinary boundaries and is more connected from practical concerns. An example of this in contemporary business schools can be seen in business schools which strive to become safe spaces for self-reflection, ‘identity play’ and (re)construction of the self (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2017). For example, Petriglieri and colleagues created a programme where executives worked with a psychotherapist ‘transforming potentially regressive experiences into material for personal learning, experimentation, and growth’ (Petriglieri, Wood, Petriglieri, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Recent commentary about business school depicts them as profoundly compromised institutions which should be bulldozed (e.g., Parker, 2018; Fleming, 2021). In this piece, we have argued that the history of British business education provides a plurality of models offering new hope for alternative futures. Each of these models shows not only what kind of students can benefit from the business schools, but also where educators' efforts are best directed.

Each of these models come with potential dark sides as well as sparks of hope. The Colonial School reminds that exploitative business practices can be central to education, but it also prompts us to decolonizing our curriculum. The Workers School, initially designed for the appeasement of the working class, inspires us to see business education as an engine of social mobility. The Civic School can be beholden to local interests, but it also reminds us of the 'public value' Business Schools can generate. The Management Movement alerts us to how business schools can disenfranchise workers. At the same time, it illuminates a future where Business Schools can become centres for the interdisciplinary understanding of grand challenges. Finally, the Collegiate School reminds us that business schools can become elites recreational grounds. However, it also offers hope that they can become a space for self-reflection.

Re-engaging with these histories of British business schools reminds people working in them are not trapped in a single neo-liberal model. Rather, the past provides alternatives models which can and do serve as sources of institutional innovation (Bridgman, et al., 2016). We could hope for a Business School which provides inclusive curricula, representing minorities. One that attracts a wider population from many social background and is motivated by a civic duty to their local community, as well as by a broader focus on grand challenges. One that encourages critical-thinking to ensure the mistakes from the past are not repeated in the future. Reconsidering the history of the British Business School is an invitation to recover these models from the past and use them as a resource for imagining alternative futures.

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Table 1: Five Alternative Models of British Business Education

Period	Model (Archetype)	Typical Student	Historical Reflection	Informing the Future of Business Schools
1800s – 1850s	The Colonial School (e.g. East India College)	Colonial administrators, attention to statecraft.	Education can perpetuate regimes that have embedded injustice in them, and not honour diverse identities.	<u>Post-Colonial School:</u> Business School critical of the systems in which it operates; values diverse voices of scholars and students. Contribution: a space for reflection on the origins of Western learning as a product of colonial structures.
1820s – 1900s	The Workers School (e.g. Mechanics Institutes in Edinburgh and Glasgow)	Industry workers and administrators, attention to practical and administrative skills.	Education of the ‘working class’ based on developing practical skills to fill industry driven needs. Focus on self-development.	<u>Social Mobility School:</u> Non-elite Business School rooted in technical skills that can provide self-development and the ability to acquire concrete competences at pace with the ever-changing world of work. Contribution: focus widening access and provision of practical learning and innovation, to avoid that the skills acquired become obsolete.
1900 - Present	The Civic School (e.g. University of Birmingham, Department of Commerce)	Officers of business firms, attention to skills instrumental for local business.	Education based on the idea that a ‘business class’ should be rooted in civic purpose for public good.	<u>Public Value School:</u> Business School that creates public value through using research expertise to work closely with civic stakeholders. Contribution: connection with local community and territory to contribute the development and influence of public policies and knowledge.
1920s – 1930s	The Management Movement (e.g. Management Research Group)	Professional managers, attention to interdisciplinary, effective, management practices.	Education based on scientific principles of management. Evidence based teaching should support precision in decision making and in the design of work processes.	<u>Movement Convening School:</u> Business School that connects social movements with research-based management expertise. This creates a basis for development of new business practices and serving a greater societal good. Contribution: ambition for resolution of Grand Challenges by bringing together interdisciplinary knowledge in business and management.

1945 – 2000s	The Collegiate School (e.g. Administrative Staff College, Henley)	Experienced company executives, attention to the provision of a safe space for sharing knowledge.	Education based on the collective experiences shared by managers. Self-learning and self-reflection are used to address collegial, practical issues.	<p><u>Reflective Practice School:</u> Business School that roots learning in knowledge sharing and self-reflection.</p> <p>Critical thinking and the ability for self-reflection and analysis become key to management education. Contribution: emphasis on reflective and analytical skills rather than practical knowledge.</p>
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Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the insightful editorial comments and direction we received from Stephen Cummings, J.C. Spender and Ellen O'Connor. We would also like to acknowledge the PhD research of Annette Yunas Pendry which pointed us to the Administrative Staff College at Henley, and a comment from Guido Palazzo which pointed us to the East India College at Haileybury.

Author Biographies

André Spicer is Professor of Organizational Behaviour and Head of the Faculty of Management at Bayes Business School, City, University of London. He is an expert in organization theory.

Zahira Jaser is Assistant Professor at Sussex Business School, Sussex University. She is an expert in middle management and leadership. She recently published a book entitled 'The Connecting Leader'.

Caroline Wiertz is Professor of Marketing and Deputy Dean at Bayes Business School, City, University of London. She is an expert in consumer research and digital marketing.