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# Introduction to the Special Issue Critical Management Studies and Managerial Education: New Contexts? New Agenda?

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## Introduction

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Critical Management Studies (CMS) has become remarkably successful in establishing itself as an alternative to voice among management scholars; so successful, in fact, that it now has its own well-attended conference, a division within the Academy of Management and numerous handbooks; with the publication of a collection of 'classic' readings (Alvesson, 2011), meanwhile, it has apparently arrived as a fully-fledged tradition. Much of this has been achieved by virtue of the growth of a stream of research writings which, at their most generic, aspire to de-stabilise taken-for-granted understandings of management. Yet one of the most potent ways in which CMS has an impact, or a potential impact, is not through the scholarly activities of the academy but through the classroom. For it is here that CMS meets actual, future or aspiring managers as well, of course, as actual, future or aspiring policymakers, trade unionists or just rank-and-file employees. This aspect of the CMS 'project' is often referred to as Critical Management Education (CME). It is not our intention here to discuss CMS or CME in detail (for concise overviews of each, see Willmott (2008) and Grey (2008)), but rather to point to some of the most obvious questions and tensions posed by them. The most obvious of these tensions is the way that CMSE<sup>1</sup> is positioned within business schools which, as many (e.g. Zald, 2002) have noted, gives rise to a strained, if not paradoxical, situation. In particular, if the claim of the business school mainstream is, again to put it at its most generic, functional expertise in the management of organizations, then what can be the place of CMSE when it typically denies either that such expertise exists or that it is desirable, or both? Is CMSE simply a parasite within business schools, feeding upon a legitimacy which

1. For ease of exposition we will use the acronym CMSE to cover both CMS and CME

it denies? Is it, perhaps, no more than a 'court jester', tolerated by the mainstream but always marginal to it? Is its aspiration to 'take over' business schools and become the new mainstream? Or is the ultimate goal the destruction of the business school and itself with it?

At the same time, the very success of CMSE in establishing itself as a recognizable grouping within the business school world also poses critical questions about its own practices. Is it, in fact, so very different to that which it critiques? Is it not the case that its sources of reputation and legitimacy are extremely conventional and conservative – that is to say the journals, books, handbooks and readers that are standard to academic legitimacy? For example, it has been argued (Bell and King, 2010) that the conference practices of CMSE reproduce many of the standard processes of hierarchy and exclusion which it might be expected to abjure. With respect to the practice of management education in particular, a longstanding tension has revolved around whether a critical approach to management can be taught using conventional pedagogies (Grey, Knights and Willmott, 1996).

Whilst these debates have existed ever since CMSE emerged under that label in the 1990s, they now have an additional complexity. The institution of the mainstream business school has itself undergone some significant challenges and changes during the same period, and has become the subject of considerably more, and more sophisticated, internal analysis and critique than in the past (e.g. Khurana, 2007; Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007). In particular, the global financial and economic crisis of the last four years has cast a harsh light upon business schools. After all, many members of the financial and corporate elites which caused the crisis, as well as many of the consultants, accountants, regulators and politicians who were complicit within it, had been the recipients of MBA education at some of the world's top business schools. More generally, the enmeshment of business schools with the ideologies of neo-classical economics and managerialism has been exposed by the financial crisis as never before, as brilliantly outlined by Locke and Spender (2011). But if these events pose challenges for business schools in general then so, too, must they for CMSE, nested as it is within the business school institution. Simply to respond that 'we always said business schools were flawed' would be quite inadequate without some clear articulation of how they should be reformed. This remains an ongoing task and makes the continued attempt to explore CMSE an urgent one, to which this special issue contributes.

## **OUTLINE OF CONTRIBUTIONS**

It is within this broad terrain of paradoxes and tensions inflected through a highly charged and evolving political context that the contributions to this special issue are located. The issue begins with a consideration of the work of the philosopher Jacques Rancière, whose thinking is seen by the authors to provide a means of resolving one of the dilemmas

mentioned above: what is the authority position and expertise of the critical educator? Using Rancière leads to a rethinking of management as politics, a politics that seeks to express the disagreements and hear the voices of those who are ignored or oppressed by business principles and the violence they generate, but who must nevertheless be recognized as equal.

The first part of the paper introduces the idea of unresolved dilemmas. The authors recall that the goal of a critical management education should be to emancipate those educated; thus, management should be thought of and taught as a social, political and moral practice. Management cannot be reduced to a set of techniques. Hence, it is not merely in its specific contents but also in specific educational practices that a critical approach to management should differ. It should challenge the position of expertise and authority included in traditional teaching relationships by fighting against the hegemony of simplification and resisting the urge for conceptual closure. Very often a model of rational deliberation is called for that could create the conditions for dialogue between actors in a manner reminiscent of Paulo Freire (cf. Perriton and Reynolds, 2004). The objective is to make the learner a critical being able to engage in critical reasoning, critical self-reflection and critical engagement with currently existing practices.

Huault and Perret focus then on the irreducible tensions that are associated with attitudes to power and authority in their relation to knowledge, establishing a distinction between a radical orientation and a pragmatic one. In the first orientation, the separation of roles between knowledge and practice is clear, and the educator is responsible for examining management seriously rather than adhering obsequiously to the values of managers and the beliefs of students. Conversely, the second posture highlights the importance of the practitioner's experience. The goal is to take advantage of any possibility of producing emancipating knowledge, whilst acknowledging that the educator does not hold a position of superiority. The limit of the radical orientation is the marginalization of the intellectuals it gathers in its fold, as well as a questioning of the extent to which such 'left' positions, in their ability to generate discomfort among students, are ethical in terms of the world of work that they will face or be engaged in. The limits of the pragmatic approach are the possibilities of assimilation and appropriation of the knowledge produced. Although the complementarity of radical and pragmatic approaches is called for, it is difficult to achieve: academics who recommend keeping a necessary distance and disengagement vis-à-vis the dominant and the privileged will invariably depart from those who defend the possibility of playing the role of the more critically engaged pragmatists.

According to the authors, the value of Rancière's work is to call for a break with the processual dimension of emancipation on two levels. First, in the philosopher's view, equality is not an ideal to strive for but a principle to act upon. Second, for Rancière, emancipation emerges from discord and dispute. Politics, and practice of emancipation, occur when disagreement is expressed, that is to say when an egalitarian logic takes over from a logic of policing. What is needed, he argues, is

not to reveal their domination to the dominated, who are usually already conscious of it, but rather to give them a vision of themselves as being capable of living a destiny other than that of the exploited. Rancière insists on the critical role of dissent and disagreement for emancipation, the creation of spaces to allow anarchic politics that disrupt the traditional democratic order organized around “those who have title to rule” because of their birth or their knowledge. It invites those who do not count into the debate: the 99% as opposed to the 1%. For Rancière, emancipation is highly individual and it is not possible to think of institutionalized forms of emancipatory practices. A political actor, in the sense of politics developed by Rancière, is not a group that gives voice and imposes its weight in society, but rather an operator that conjoins and disjoins regions, identities, functions and capabilities that exist in the configuration of a given experiment. Rancière offers therefore a philosophy with which to “Occupy Wall Street” and foster the emergence of polyphony to fight the elitism of management education and to evolve toward more heterogeneity.

Huault and Perret’s interest in Rancière’s clear distinction between politics and police, and his idea of equality as a principle to act upon rather than an (ultimate) goal, is representative of a tendency on the part of French critical scholars to draw on non-standard resources, theories and methods for the task of developing more critical perspectives that are likely to be stifled in the current context. Indeed, because of the economic and employment crisis, the fact that management education may have objectives other than developing employability may be difficult to accept, especially in institutions like business schools, which are assessed on the average salaries of their graduates rather than through the quality and social significance of their research and teaching. Any objectives which stray from serving the needs of business can appear suicidal today. However, a key challenge in these times of crisis is to think differently, and Rancière provides some ideas with which to do so.

This difficulty in thinking and working differently is a challenge addressed in Grima’s paper, with a focus on faculty working in French business schools. To understand the general thrust of the argument one should recall the decisive role in social reproduction played by French grandes écoles and the strong opposition that exists between the “schools of knowledge” and the “schools of power”, to use Bourdieu and de Saint Martin’s categories (1987). The latter category, which includes the most prestigious business schools, provides the best “market value of educational titles” despite a “lesser value in terms of education per se” (Bourdieu and de Saint Martin, 1987: 19). Intellectual values are not supposed to prevail in “schools of power”. Of course, French business schools differ from those of many other countries in one important respect: their mode of governance, as they are generally under the control of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry. It is because of this control that the rules for the recruitment and administration of professors depart from those applied in state universities. Requirements regarding academic qualifications appeared quite recently

and have been more or less imposed by accreditation organizations, whose influence has increased with the internationalization of higher education. As a result, management education in France is marked by two tendencies: a growing interest in research and a quest for legitimacy that often makes professors in management focus on issues and approaches which are “useful” for improving corporations’ efficiency. Even though French scholars may benefit from the impressive intellectual capital that French sociological and philosophical approaches such as those of Bourdieu, Foucault, Derrida and Lacan represent, overturning the tradition is not so easy, especially in the radical branches of the Anglo-Saxon world. In particular, when students have to pay high fees for their education, breaking with the tendency to prepare them for well-paid positions seems a daunting task. Still, the theoretical resources available to French scholars could help them to advance an agenda that is authentically critical; they may have a unique opportunity to be “tempered radicals”, to use the phrase coined by Meyerson and Scully (1995).

Grima explores this idea in a paper that presents the results of a qualitative study and describes how French critical management scholars manage the difficulty of operating in a universe whose dominant values are not theirs, another of the fundamental tensions for CMSE identified above. From a total sample of seventeen scholars, the paper portrays seven as displaying a clearly oppositional stance, while the remaining ten seem more “conciliatory” or “accommodating”; they display a form of “soft activism”.

More precisely, although one of the main characteristics of a tempered radical is to be able to exist without being absorbed by his/her organization or being rejected and unable to act, seven of the seventeen interviewees find it difficult to be accepted as legitimate in their own identity of critical scholars. Consequently, they often find themselves in an oppositional situation (be it overt or clandestine). Although these people achieve small successes, they know they are marginalized within their business schools and must find support in external groups and networks; while they do not publish in journals that support a system that they condemn, their position mainly relies on favourable assessment of their courses, and this experience is described as frustrating and exhausting.

The paper highlights that more “pragmatic” critical scholars experience less conflict. Their ultimate goal is to make certain critiques of management more “easily understood” and therefore accepted. The comparison between those who adopt an oppositional position and those who adopt a moderate position suggests that, beyond individual strategies, context is very important. Also, Grima observes that the offering of firm but non-vehement criticism is easier in some institutions than others. According to the author, it is not the positioning of the school (renowned business schools/grandes écoles vs less prestigious ones) that makes the difference. The key issue is, perhaps, not the distance that still separates the French grandes écoles from genuine critical business schools so much as the conditions for the emergence of business schools that are open to polyphony and dissent, characteristics

that lie at the heart of Rancière's thinking.

Grima's paper, which stresses the difficulty of resisting with complete legitimacy within business schools, leads into a consideration of which theoretical resources are likely to help frame how resistance and struggle could become the very fulcrum of educational purposes in management. With a similar motivation, the research note by Pierson draws heavily on the work of Axel Honneth: hardly a familiar resource for readers of this journal, one presumes. Pierson highlights that, for Honneth, recognition implies struggle and even collective resistance. In light of this, teaching new managerial tools and practices is not enough to equip students for life. These students may be thought of, broadly, as (actual or future) managerial cadres. Such cadres suffer increasingly, even though for many years they have been thought of as privileged individuals benefiting from specific company practices. They suffer from being more and more like any other employee, their status meaning less and less. Like everybody else in the business world, they are overworked, lack autonomy, and feel increasingly isolated. They are also pushed to act in ways that go against their own values, and so can no longer be proud of the work they do. For such people in such circumstances, resistance should be taught, with the priority being to help cadres to reflect more so as to strengthen their identity. Pierson therefore focuses on "subjective resistance" (Thomas, 2009) rather than on "productive resistance" (Courpasson, Dany and Clegg, 2011).

In doing so, she draws on Honneth's idea that individuals cannot develop without being recognized by those with whom they interact. Struggle and recognition are needed to construct strong identities (and to make individuals proud of who they are and of their singularity). From this point of view, the problem with current management practices is that they undermine self-esteem. Indeed, esteem is no longer automatically granted to social groups, and, because it is more and more difficult to secure, putatively elite individuals tend to suffer contempt that prevents them from acting freely. Collective resistance can help individuals to overcome inhibition. What seems to be critical in Honneth's outlook is that individuals who engage in collective resistance share feelings of contempt, thus they are no longer alone and despicable but can experience empathy for who they are.

Honneth's theory is seen by Pierson to have implications for critical management education. Building on the literature and using her own experience, she suggests that the case study method can be used under certain conditions to prepare students for confrontation and the struggle for recognition, where a critical, dialogical and debating style is cultivated in the classroom. Using case studies can foster confrontation and help students be more aware of their singularity but it may not be enough to make them experience sympathy with the other. Students need to be taught empathy by professors who adopt a critical stance. Thus, according to Pierson, the case study method can be useful for learning collective resistance because the group can help members encountering difficulties to convince an audience and develop a collective identity. Yet, her text tries to explore the usefulness but also the limitations of the case study method and in this way speaks to the dilemma

for CMSE about how a critical pedagogy can proceed.

Complementary to these reflections on how specific theories and practices can help to develop and legitimize a critical stance within management education in the French educational context in particular, the fourth contribution to the Special Issue is Starkey's review of Augier's and March's provocative analysis of North American business schools in the period after the Second World War. In their book *The Roots, Rituals, and Rhetorics of Change: North American Business Schools After the Second World War*, Augier and March tell a story that sees the inexorable rise of a neo-classical economics dominate the curriculum and ideology of business schools. The effects of this are now quite evident in the current crisis affecting business schools, and, as Starkey suggests, this leads to the question of whether business schools today are best conceived of as professional schools or schools of social science, for management or about management. For CMSE, unlike more mainstream critiques of business schools (e.g. Pfeffer and Fong, 2002), the answer has always been 'about' rather than 'for', but how well will that stance serve in future? Arguably, the financial crisis and its implications for business schools open up a once-in-a-generation opportunity for CMSE to have an impact upon its institutional host, which moves beyond the 'for or about' management debate towards articulating a different set of commitments.

The emerging street-level opposition to the effects of the neo-liberal hegemony of the last three or four decades articulates a critique of business in terms of the way it is blind to the interests of 'the 99%' and favours 'the 1%'. Yet this does not mean that we face a world without businesses or international trade; the challenge, rather, is to find and encourage alternative forms of business and trade which are less economically and socially divisive and less ecologically cavalier than the recently dominant business model of maximised shareholder value. Business schools are part of the "cultural circuit of capitalism" (Thrift, 2005: 6) in which knowledge of and about capitalism is produced, reproduced and disseminated. If there is any prospect of a reformed style of capitalism emerging from the crisis then it will entail the elaboration of new forms of knowledge, and business schools can be an actor within this. Perhaps CMSE's contribution can be to seek to recast business schools as institutions which research, devise, promote and teach such alternatives, and which are neither for nor about the 1% but rather both for and about the remaining 99%.



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