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'Humanities' Business' and other narratives

How to read the future of management education?

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In summary, management education currently is clearly at a crossroads. Many of the observations made by AACSB, EFMD and the Colby Report point to a series of consistent weaknesses in the development of a range of managerial capabilities from creative, critical thinking to integrative problem-f raming and solving that would enhance the basic knowledge of business and analytic skills.

Thomas et al. 2014: 11

Every generation thinks it knows what it does, especially the reformers in a generation.

Locke 1996: 145

Introduction

The following remarks present the background to this chapter by outlining the current debate on the integration of the humanities and social sciences into management education. Based on this outline, we establish the historical and systematic framework for an analysis of three selected reports on management education, which is subsequently presented in the manner of a recursive operation. Because the current debate shows an emerging consensus among business schools and other stakeholders of management education that the integration of the humanities and social sciences might be a productive and even necessary factor in the future of management education, the chapter as a whole aims at substantiating this consensus by applying humanities' and social sciences' narratological expertise to the arguments and hypotheses offered by those reports to showcase the potential of such integrational endeavours.

In 2011, the report Rethinking Undergraduate Business Education. Liberal Learning for the Profession (Colby et al. 2011; see also Sullivan, Ehrlich and Colby, this volume), which was sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation, reacted to the recent financial crises by pointing out that management education could and should be improved by integrating the expertise offered by the liberal arts or, put from a European perspective, by the humanities and social sciences. Since then, this issue has developed into a crucial part of the debate on what Thomas et al. (2014) in the passage quoted above describe as the raison d'être of business schools worldwide, that is the enhancement
of 'the basic knowledge of business and analytic skills' by 'creative thinking' and 'integrative problem-framing' (Colby et al. 2011: 11). The debate focusing on such skills in management education, most recently summed up comprehensively by Thomas et al. (2014), has identified a number of 'specific skill gaps in particular concerning the teaching of creativity and innovative thinking', 'ethical and moral perspectives', 'critical thinking and skills of reflection and integration' and 'skills in cognitive and emotional intelligence' (Colby et al. 2011: 23).

The appearance of the Carnegie Report (also known as the Colby Report) is indicative of the fact that for quite some time now this debate has approached the questions as to how those skills could be taught by looking for answers in the humanities and social sciences. Already in 1959 with the publication of the first Carnegie Report on US management education, a strong plea was made to make more and better use of the liberal arts (Pierson 1959). The Carnegie Report of 2011 has shown that in the meantime some US business schools have already moved to tentatively introducing those subjects into management education on several levels – and it has also pointed out systemic problems encountered by such moves. These range from basic organizational difficulties in coordinating curricula and faculty from different disciplines; the seeming impossibility of agreement on the precise disciplinary content of integrated courses and programmes; up to and including the respective institutions' concepts of what the humanities and social sciences exactly are or are not and what they could or should offer to management education.

Two years after the appearance of the Carnegie Report, the Presidency of the University of St Gallen in Switzerland launched the research project 'Humanities' Business'. The project's title is a shortened version of its motto: 'Humanity's Business is the Humanities' Business'. It has to be explained at this point that the term 'humanities', as the project team uses it, programmatically includes the social sciences which, we fully realize, is not self-evident because academic tradition today still views the humanities and the social sciences as separate sets of disciplines. We, however, use the term inclusively for the reason that the term 'social sciences' in management education is usually employed rather broadly for fields and competences that have come to be considered to be part of its core fields and thus are subject to the same normative epistemological standards of research and teaching content. As we are proceeding on the insight that the development these standards went through over recent decades is part of the problem that the integration of as yet non-core fields and competences is trying to solve, we decided on our part to use the term 'humanities' broadly for expertise and practices in the field of humanities and social sciences that are not yet part of the core of management education but are under discussion to be developed in this direction.

The project's motto encodes the collaborating team's leading hypothesis that the humanities and social sciences are indeed offering several specialized types of knowledge that are not readily available to students of management and related disciplines in their core courses but are certainly relevant to their professional education. This hypothesis is based on the assumption – an assumption that seems to be the undisputed core of the consensus emerging from the debate outlined earlier – that the professional practice of management can no longer be taught as merely the efficient application of tools to further the financial success of any single enterprise. Rather, in light of the huge impact that the recent crises have shown management practices to have on global society as a whole, it must be taught as a societal practice that is embedded in an enormously complex web of individual and collective interests, historically grown and culturally informed patterns of thought and behaviour and methodologically diverse approaches to problem-solving, to name but a few of the issues arising from this embeddedness. The institutional background of the project is the university's Contextual Studies programme, which was established in 2001 in the course of the Bologna reform and is currently being restructured by the Humanities' Business project in the role of a conceptual think tank. In this role, we are
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currently creating a report on European business schools' best practices of the integration of
humanities and social sciences into management education, aiming to complement the Carne-
gie Report, which exclusively covers US business schools' efforts in this field.

The ultimate goal of the project is to offer some constructive perspectives on how to improve
on such attempts at integration, ideally involving the stakeholders of both management educa-
tion and the humanities and social sciences in the process. Preliminary findings gathered by the
project team's review of the available literature on this topic, however, suggest that the mere
reporting on the status quo – either in US or in European business schools – is unlikely to
achieve that because the problems encountered by schools that try for an integrational educa-
tion are problems not simply of institutional governance or of financial, infrastructural and fac-
ulty resources, but rather of how to deal with the notion of knowledge as such (see Parker, this
volume). To integrate knowledge or knowledges from other disciplines into curricula, which are
in themselves based on a strong certainty about the inviolability of their disciplinary cores, obvi-
ously challenges this notion to an extent that goes far beyond the complexities of organization
inherent in a serious reform of management education.

Therefore, a report covering this angle clearly needs an approach that performs rather than
stipulates the integration of the humanities' and social sciences' expertise. On those grounds,
the following deliberations set out the methodological foundations for such an approach by
focusing on the genre of reporting itself. They are based on the assumption that the genre of
reporting participates in shaping its subject through providing both conceptual input and
benchmarking information, thus constructing the future of management education discursively.
Their main aim is to understand the normative framework underlying the conceptualizations
offered, as well as the selection of the examples used for benchmarking. To achieve this, we will
treat the historical and current discourse on management education as a group of texts whose
common subject matter has generated specific – genre-typical – techniques of stating their case.
In short, we will treat them as narratives aiming to generate coherent concepts of management
education, which are not, in and of themselves, necessarily preordained by facts but rather devel-
oped through the desire to make sense of those facts by selecting and reframing them according
to the respective point of view of their authors and their contexts.

The reshaping of academic education in Prussia during the first half of the nineteenth century
according to Wilhelm von Humboldt's concept of cosmopolitanism marked the emergence of a
university system that is still today broadly recognized as the standard paradigm of the modern
university. Humboldt took the idea of the studium generale as it was called in pre-modern univer-
sities – a first-year education in the 'liberal arts' that was mandatory to all students regardless of
their later specialization – to a whole new level. Indeed, it was Humboldt who first advanced
the case for an integrated type of education, arguing that it was the university's mission to make its
students into cosmopolitans or citizens of the world by offering them a holistic educational expe-
rience compounded of all types of academic knowledge instead of merely a narrow professional
training. The practical implementation of Humboldt's ideas, however, came with the institutional
segregation of these types of knowledge into academic disciplines, creating boundaries that over
the past two centuries have solidified into near-insurmountable abuttals. Born from the conviction
that students' education should be able to draw on all areas of expertise available, the Humboldti-an
university has therefore evolved into a system that today threatens to sabotage its original purpose.

In the framework of this system, dealing with narratives has been firmly within the remit of
the humanities' and social sciences' disciplinary domain. This was and was still the case, partly
because the data the scholars in this domain work with are mostly embedded in or consisting of
narratives, partly because working with those data requires an expertise in the areas of fiction
and rhetoric that is traditionally viewed to be incompatible with the standards of rigour professed
to by most other disciplines, including economics and management studies. For some decades now, however, the latter has begun to recognize the importance of the role that narratives are playing in the construction of societal reality as a whole, seeing that, as Bruner (1990) points out, they not only provide 'interpretative templates for sense-making' (Czarniawska 2008) but actively create the frameworks of value for making sense of said reality. As Grint (2005) and Fairhurst (2007) have comprehensively shown in their studies on narratives and leadership, the narratives we draw upon and are embedded in affect the way we perceive complex issues and thus affect the way we engage with these issues in practice. The issue in question here is the integration of humanities' and social sciences' expertise in management education. This means that the narratives on this issue, which are created by reports on management education, are affected by previous narratives whose acts of making sense directly or indirectly feed into the framework of values created by those reports, whilst at the same time the reports themselves affect practical reality by imposing such frameworks on the data they present.

In light of these preliminary reflections, the genre of reporting on management education begs a number of interesting questions, the first and foremost being how reports on management education perform the context in which the necessity of changes becomes visible and, indeed, inescapable. Analysing this, it is necessary to determine which issues are rendered critical and which are marginalized or left out altogether, which purposes of management education are seen as central, which interventions and changes are proposed to improve on the accomplishment of those purposes and, finally and perhaps most crucially, what overall logics are used to combine all these factors into a cohesive concept. Indeed, we could say that the Carnegie Report established a landscape that this volume is responding to.

To test the viability of such an analysis, we have chosen three reports – all three of which have already answered at least part of the first question posed earlier in the affirmative because all three reports either have proved or are certainly about to prove their practical impact on the reality of management education. Our first report is by Howard Thomas, who wrote *Securing the Future of Management Education: Competitive Destruction or Constructive Innovation?* (Thomas et al. 2014). Thomas is the former Dean of the Lee Kong Chian Business School at Singapore Management University and also former Vice-President of the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), which runs the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS).

This is a system that will have a crucial influence on business schools' overall acceptance of the improvement on management education by the integration of the humanities and social sciences. The second report by Rakesh Khurana, Professor at the Harvard Business School and author of the study *From Higher Aims to Hired Hands* (Khurana 2007), has had an important part in the 2009 establishment of the famous MBA oath by which Harvard Business School (HBS) students on graduation publicly commit to professional integrity. Finally, the Carnegie Report by Anne Colby, Thomas Ehrlich, William M. Sullivan and Jonathan R. Dolle has, since its appearance in 2011, become a highly influential motor of the debate on the future of management education, especially concerning the integration of the humanities and social sciences. Only a year after its appearance, it led to the renowned Aspen Institute's founding of a new Undergraduate Business Education Consortium in the context of their Business in Society Program (BSP) closely involving several of the report's authors (Sullivan, Ehrlich and Colby, this volume).

**Reporting for a field in transition: diagnostical, genealogical and programmatic narratives**

Recent and current reports in management education practically all implicitly or explicitly subscribe to the idea that was put forth most prominently by Michel Foucault's work, that is that
the reality of life is pre-eminently shaped by societal discourse, by linguistic operations that make sense either out of heretofore disordered or even chaotic phenomena or by redefining established frameworks of value (Foucault 1972). At first glance this seems to be stating the obvious, seeing that certainly no author who is concerned with contributing constructively to an issue as important as management education would go to the trouble of working hard on a report if they didn’t believe that what they write might make a difference. The most important point of the analysis of discourse as established by Foucault, however, is to stipulate both the writer’s and the reader’s awareness of the techniques and instruments used by the former. Transposed on to reports on management education, this means that – especially if such reports indeed aim at impacting on the reality of business schools by propagating an education that includes the ability to think critically – they would ideally have to demonstrate and thus invite critical thinking by reflecting explicitly on the ways and means by which they build their argument as a whole.

Most reports, of course, are quite clear in outlining their premises and methodology for harvesting and evaluating data according to the disciplinary methodology taught at business schools to them and by them. But few, if any of them, are – or show themselves to be – aware of the fact that they are aligning their findings by means of discursive operations that have their own crucial part in creating the meaning that those reports aim at. As the historiographer Hayden White has pointed out, however, there is no such thing as a discursive operation without an impact on its content because any such operation is historically fraught, contextually motivated and selectively highlights semantic nuances at the cost of others, to name but a few aspects. It is simply impossible to convey factual substance without its being shaped by the form it is given in language (White 1987). In other words, writing – and reading – a report on management education impacts on reality not only through presenting facts culled by a method of research as such but also by the discursive logic informing their presentation, that is the narrative or narratives chosen to frame their content.

So far, the findings of our review of the discourse on the integration of the humanities in management education have suggested that there are three predominant types of genre—typical narratives: the diagnostic, the genealogical and the programmatic. The diagnostic narrative most prominently uses the presentation of empirical evidence on current management education to show up the flaws and fallacies in the system or systems described, implying that the consequences to be drawn from their findings should be taken as more or less self-evident. In the genealogical narrative, too, empirical evidence plays a major role; this role, however, is determined by a historiographical approach that aims to show by what means and because of what reasons current problems have developed in time, either openly stating or implying that the removal or modification of said means and reasons will solve those problems. Compared with the diagnostic and the genealogical type, the programmatic narrative relies less heavily on factual evidence, usually taking for granted that it is well known by its readers; therefore, it presents an initial thesis as to the ideal future of management education, using empirical data mainly to illustrate a sharply profiled, more often than not deliberately provocative and even controversial argument.

It must be understood that the descriptive separation of these three types of narrative is a heuristic tool constructed for the sake of analysing the genre. There are in fact very few reports that are obviously and sometimes even intentionally representing one and only one of the three types; most of them combine elements of all three narratives. As reports on management education usually aim at getting across a concrete message, it could be said that the genre by definition shares a programmatic approach. This even holds for the diagnostic narrative because already the selection of evidence for presentation from the huge mass of available facts constitutes an act of programmatic interpretation. The same goes for the genealogical narrative: when reconstructing
chains of cause and effect to explain what went wrong in the past and thus needs to be remedied in the future, it is not only of necessity equally selective in dealing with its diagnostic material but also imposes a historiographical order, the logic of which is a programmatic construction, leading purposefully to the point of its intent. The programmatic narrative, on the other hand, is always at least implicitly diagnostic and even genealogical in nature to ground its claims to the feasibility of its arguments, whilst it explicitly emphasizes the constructive polemics that the other two types are rather more discreet about.

The point of our heuristic typification, therefore, is not to sort the genre into convenient pigeon-holes but rather to identify the techniques that reports use to state their cases and consider their implications for the ideas on the future of management education that the respective reports offer. To this purpose, we have identified the three reports, mentioned earlier, as characteristic of the field, both for preferential leanings towards one type of narrative and for using elements of the others. After presenting this selected reading, we will offer our conclusions, embedded in a description of our own programmatic agenda.

The diagnostic narrative: Thomas et al. 2014

The objective of the diagnostic narrative is to question established presuppositions as to how management education is provided, but with a focus on diagnosing the different potentials for novelty in ongoing efforts in the field. Contrary to a more programmatic effort, the diagnostic approach does not provide for yet another special change agenda but seeks to stimulate change by showing up heterogeneous developments, which in different ways point towards novel approaches in the construction and delivery of management education. The diagnostic approach, therefore, departs from an understanding of the field of management education as a field in transition, but with multiple potential pathways and multiple efforts taking shape in and actively reshaping the field of management education.

The report *Securing the Future of Management Education. Competitive Destruction or Constructive Innovation?* by Thomas et al. (2014) is very explicit about using the diagnostic approach. This is the second volume in a series that started in 2013 with the report *Promises Fulfilled and Unfulfilled in Management Education* (Thomas et al. 2013), which ‘provided interview and other evidence’ about its subject, and it ‘focuses much more closely on emerging trends, and uncertain futures in management education […] using an open-ended interview process’ (Thomas et al. 2014: Foreword). From the start, it is thus made clear that its content is firmly based on evidential matter that needs to be taken seriously as purely factual, leaving no room for speculation or ideology.

Formally, this stipulation is underlined by the report’s text being divided into short chapters, which in turn consist of series of short paragraphs interspersed with numerous bullet point lists of conclusions and accompanied on the margins by extracts printed in bold to stress particularly important items. Modelled on the rhetorics of the PowerPoint presentation, which has become one of the most established ways of conveying information in management education – and indeed in the upper echelons of management practice – it serves to induce trust by showing that the report’s authors are fully versed in the modes of communication that dominate the field on which they are reporting. This form bulwarks the report against any possible accusation of creating homogeneity where the authors perceive there to be none – or at most very little – narrative construction. In fact, the form chosen by the authors might even be called that of an anti-narrative, aiming to give a tightly built itemization of the status quo without any deliberations on the subjects, which are not directly covered by the evidence quoted.

The report’s methodology is thus firmly anchored in positivism, an expression coined in the nineteenth century for the technique with which the academic humanities tried to counteract
the suspicion that — compared with the natural sciences — they might be ‘soft’ in their approach to reality through substantiating their findings by relentless factography. Interestingly, the report’s positivism creates an inconsistency between its discursive practice and one of its most stringently advocated programmatic elements: the supremacy of practical relevance over academic rigour in management education. Although its positivistic stance stresses the report’s commitment to ‘real life’ facts and thus to relevance, the formal structure, together with multiple quotations from other reports and related journal articles, places the report firmly in the camp of academic rigour.

Although the report strives for the utmost diagnostic objectivity both through its formal structure and through safeguarding the evidential quality of the content by means of extensively quoting the interviewed respondents, the strong focus that the report puts on particular problems is in itself a statement of a certain framework of values directing their selection. Chapter 5 ‘Conjectures: the road travelled and the road less travelled’ sheds some interesting light on this framework, stating programmatically that management education’s basic ‘problem […] is that business schools were never designed to have a purely academic focus. They were always meant to provide pragmatic, real-life management skills to managers, who after business school, would be going back into the marketplace’ (Thomas et al. 2014: 125). This statement formulates three presuppositions: (1) it stipulates that business schools were in fact ‘designed’, invented and built intentionally for a certain purpose, which (2) clashes with ‘a purely academic focus’ because this focus is incremental to the (3) ‘real-life’ necessities that management students face after their education — ‘real-life’ being categorically encoded as ‘the marketplace’.

The first of these presuppositions is a genealogical argument that has been built by the report’s authors in their first book (Thomas et al. 2013), serving here to maintain that the current problems of management education as a whole stem from its deviation from its original purpose. The nature of this purpose becomes clear in the following presuppositions. Not only is ‘academic’ education as such unable to provide for practical skills but, even worse, it hampers the students’ application of whatever they have learned in a ‘real life’ outside business schools, the demands of which are obviously perceived as structurally different from the ‘real life’ to which students of other disciplines have to deal with. These presuppositions are, on the one hand, based on the assessment that management education is more important to ‘real life’ outside academia than most, if not all, other courses of academic education and, on the other hand, based on the assumption that ‘real life’ as such conforms to the logic of ‘the marketplace’.

The logic of ‘the market place’ therefore also informs the report’s discourse on the possible use that the humanities’ expertise might be put to. There are mainly two areas where the humanities’ expertise is expected to impact positively on management education: teaching integrative problem solving and providing for morality. A passage describing a revised MBA programme of the University of Toronto’s Rotman School of Management in Canada formulates the hoped-for goals as follows: ‘[…] the overall aim is to produce a holistic student perspective on management […] that will encourage the development of integrative thinkers who, in management careers, will be more likely to make decisions with integrity, reflection and an ethical and moral compass’ (Thomas et al. 2014: 21). Mirrored in one of eight bullet points that sum up the current criticism of business schools — ‘the business school does not provide a clear sense of purpose, morality and ethics with respect to its role in society’ (Thomas et al. 2014: 33) — this view remains consistent in the report’s discourse on the humanities, to be recapped in the last chapter ‘Uncertain futures: what should business schools do now?’ under the heading ‘Thinking skills’:

A liberal arts education is said to provide the breadth of knowledge and the ability to view a problem from multiple perspectives and hence better equips the manager. The humanities,
in particular, have been touted as providing much-needed training in analytical thinking, critical thinking and communication as well as developing a greater awareness of self and society.

Thomas et al. 2014: 204

Accordingly, the diagnosis provided by the authors yields a two-fold purpose of integrating humanities in management education: they are to complement the perceived amorality of an education that aims at teaching the most efficient ways to earn money by linking such teaching to its societal context and thus balancing individual profit-mindedness with the awareness of global society’s needs. At the same time they are to enhance the portfolio of skills needed by management students to make profits – for themselves, for their businesses or for society as a whole – with such skills as are unique to the humanities’ expertise. What exactly these skills are, however, is hard to grasp. Tellingly, one of the bullet points outlining the ideas Gary Hamel offers on the future of management education (Hamel 2007) sums up his demand for ‘[t]he endorsement of a liberal arts model of management education’ as being motivated by the assumption that this model ‘makes management education more exciting, less boring and instrumental’ (Thomas et al. 2014: 57).

In conclusion, the diagnostic narrative of Thomas et al. (2014) gives a comprehensive account of the fact that of the main protagonists in the current debate on management education, both practitioners and educators are convinced that teaching and even possibly research in management studies could benefit from integrating the humanities’ expertise. The ideas on what this expertise might actually be about, however, are unspecific, centring mainly on issues of morality as already academically codified by the discipline of business ethics, but additionally beginning to explore the notion that there might be additional skills that could be useful for management education, even though – apart from their entertainment value – the community of management educators is not yet clear as to what these skills actually might be.

The genealogical narrative: Khurana 2007

The genealogical narrative problematizes present ideas on management education, including in particular prevailing conventions and institutionalized ‘truths’, by reconstructing the historical development of the field. In the context of this article, the term ‘genealogical’ is basically modelled on Steyaert who employs it for the analysis of discursive strategies used in entrepreneurship (Steyaert 2004), but as the term in our case is applied not to practice but to texts, it also carries a teleological dimension highlighting the discursive logics of a report that presents historical facts in a way which makes them account for the present status quo. Our focus, therefore, is not only on the explicit key question guiding the genealogical narrative – how did management education arrive at the status quo it currently finds itself in? – but again also on the framework of values directing the answers given by the report’s author as it appears in the causality informing their presentational logic.

The genealogical narrative has long been a preferred mode of intervention into the field of management education, as represented, for example, by the works of Locke (1989, 1996), Hamel (2007), Khurana (2007), Bottom (2009) and O’Connor (2012; and this volume). Mainly, the authors mentioned share the conviction that current management education has deteriorated due to having lost sight of its roots in an originally productively heterogeneous portfolio of disciplinary skills, having streamlined what today is perceived as the proper disciplinary content of management education at the cost of transdisciplinary interests. Basically joining in with the complaint of management education today being fundamentally estranged from management practices, they define ‘practice’ as the complexities of management as such, including its ethical,
processual, political, entrepreneurial and cultural aspects, criticizing management education as serving an over-specialized system of knowledge production and education which, being bogged down by academic supremacy fights, can no longer adequately answer today’s challenges. Therefore, the genealogical narrative aims at reframing management education through contesting the narratives of origins and purposes that guide reformers in their staging of change agendas, exposing their programmatic dimensions and explaining those in their historical contexts.

Rakesh Khurana’s *From Higher Aims to Hired Hands* (2007) seeks to reactualize the historical and unrealized project of developing management as a profession. He departs from a reading of the contemporary situation of management and business schools as having lost legitimacy in the wider public sphere and a pressing need to regain legitimacy through institutional reforms. The genealogical pursuit of this agenda takes the reader through a reading of the evolution of US university-based business schools and its intertwine with changing regimes of corporate governance. Khurana’s emphasis is put on the transition from a managerialist model of capitalism to an investor capitalist model of governance. According to him, this transition entails a shift in management ideals (and their associated educational purposes in business schools) from an ideal of being a cultivated ‘statesman mediator’ between the particular interest of the company and the wider interests of society to an ideal of serving the interests of shareholders focusing predominantly on financial performance criteria. Calling the former Higher Aims and the latter Hired Hands in the title of his book, Khurana makes it clear from the first that he considers the story he tells to be the story of a dramatic decline in the purpose of management education, which in turn engendered a dramatic decline of the theory and the practice of management.

The possible impact of the humanities’ expertise on the solution of the problems deriving from this decline appears on two levels in Khurana’s work. One level is that of the profession’s loss of morality implicit in his core hypothesis:

In the course of history, the logic of professionalism that underlay the university-based business school in its formative phase was replaced first by a managerialist logic that emphasized professional knowledge rather than professional ideals, and ultimately by a market logic that, taken to its conclusion, subverts the logic of professionalism altogether.  

*Khurana 2007: 7*

The presuppositions implicit in this hypothesis are that (1) university-based business schools have been founded to create and teach academic knowledge about the profession of the manager, thus, as Khurana explains elsewhere, giving societal legitimacy to a profession that before was considered as mainly concerned with administration and therefore, academically speaking, menial. Linked with this presupposition, in fact its very foundation, are two others, namely (2) that it is the academic type of education that provides for the ideals which evolve the manager from an administrator into a creative, cultivated and socially conscious leader and (3) that what Thomas et al. (2014) consider to be the ‘real life’ of management students – that is ‘the marketplace’ and its practicalities – negatively influence management education if allowed to take over and shape it according to ‘a market logic’. Submerged in these arguments, the humanities appear to be part and parcel of the academic type of education as such, explicitly inscribed in the text by Khurana’s frequent use of the term ‘ideal’ which, if today significantly de-branded by colloquial use, is in fact originally a key term of the philosophy of aesthetics that describes the concept of perfection.

Khurana’s use of the term ‘ideal’ is only one example of a rhetorical choice of terminology that conveys much more meaning than its descriptive value in the context makes apparent at first glance. Another example is that on the very first page of his introduction, Khurana twice uses the term ‘hero’, when he points out ‘the dramatic contrast between the CEO as superhero
and the CEO as anti-hero' (Khurana 2007: 1), which has structured the public discourse on managers in recent decades. By employing this term, he effectively anticipates the criticism he launches against the type of CEOs produced by business schools later on. The term 'hero', first introduced into Western mythology by the epics of Homer, describes a person who is gifted with exceptional powers and uses them to elevate him or herself above all other members of his or her peer group – not to benefit society, but to be admired unconditionally.

The second level on which Khurana involves the humanities in his work is the discursive logic of his work as a whole. The genealogical narrative as such is obviously informed by the methodology of historiography, drawing on the one hand on historical documents to reconstruct chains of cause and effect and, on the other hand, literally 'making sense' of them by setting them out in a narrative mode that interprets the facts through selection, conjecture and conjointure – and not least through the terminology chosen to represent them. Specifically, Khurana’s teleological set-up draws heavily upon one of the grand narratives of nineteenth century historiography by Edward Gibbon, whose monumental History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire appeared between 1776 and 1789.

Throughout the nineteenth century – and therefore during the formative period of the Humboldtian university system, which still dominates much of today’s academic education – the reasons for the downfall of the Roman Empire were as hotly debated in classical and ancient studies – then one of the most influential disciplines of academic study – as are the reasons for the problems in management education today. The difference that marks Khurana’s approach as genealogical as opposed to Gibbon’s more conventional adding up of what he perceives as indisputable facts, was introduced by the philosopher Oswald Spengler’s equally monumental The Decline of the West in 1918 (Spengler 1991). Spengler explicitly adopted the teleology of the previous century’s grand narrative on cultural decline, but deviated from it conceptually. Instead of accepting facts as given, he fundamentally challenged the Eurocentric framework of current historiography, maintaining that because it was predisposed to harvest and align facts following the idea that all history was firmly rooted in occidental traditions and value systems, it distorted the past and thus significantly contributed to the problems of the present. Thus, Spengler anticipated much of what Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge established later as the criticism of epistemology performed by Khurana – up to and including the latter’s use of teleology, not as a complaint about a desperate situation but as an intervention against the situation actually happening.

In conclusion, from the perspective on the humanities and their possible – or in Khurana’s case factual – relationship with management education, Khurana’s genealogical narrative can be seen as a kind of recursive operation. Setting out to reconstruct the history of management education with a view to make clear how the present problems came about, Khurana’s mode of intervening in the current debate doesn’t just stipulate the integration of the humanities but employs some of the skills taught by them to bring his point across. By doing this, instead of building up an argument that states his purpose he narratively performs it, situating management education in an evolutionary trajectory formed by changing values of managerial governance and knowledge and thus preparing the ground for such an evolutionary trajectory to take new forms in the future. That way, Khurana shows by the very logic of his discourse that the current debate on the future of management education needs to be aware of both its present and its past contexts to provide solutions for the future.

The programmatic narrative: Colby et al. 2011

The programmatic narrative is perhaps the most popular type of the three as far as debates on reforms are concerned. It is easy to process because it tells its readers from the start exactly what
they are supposed to think and ideally implement in their respective professional and/or political practices, being explicitly political in intention and rhetorics. Unlike the diagnostic and partly also the genealogical narrative, it does not harass its readers by challenging them to make sense of an *embarras de richesses* of information. Instead, the programmatic narrative openly puts forth hypotheses and groups its material around them — at least in the text it produces because, of course, these hypotheses are generated ideally by the material collected beforehand.

The programmatic approach thus tends to position itself at an abstract level of field investigation, elevated to the position of the imagined viewer above and beyond the field of study. ‘It transforms the bewitching world by which one was “possessed” into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar eye, looking down as a god’ (de Certeau 1984: 92). The programmatic style of reporting pleases the gaze of the strategist, following the vocabulary of de Certeau, but is always in danger of losing touch with practices and processes whereby the field in question is already multiplying and reinventing itself. The overview perspective totalizes its gaze and collapses diversity and novelty into ideal constructs and categories, such as disciplinary entities in management education, structuralist logics of change, linear causation, dichotomizing boundary constructions and multiple other ways of performing strategic perspectives of and for the field.

In the US context, programmatic narratives on the future of management education have been largely dominated by think-tanks like the Carnegie Foundation (Pierson 1959; Colby et al. 2011) and the Ford Foundation (Gordon and Howell 1959), whilst European contributions, far from constituting something like a coherent field, are informed by a heterogeneous composition of institutional and societal frameworks and change dynamics (Engwall and Zamagni 1998; Morsing and Sauquet Rovira 2011), even though historically the developments of the US and the European business schools are closely intertwined (Locke 1989). The think-tank reports coming from the US have provided for important programmatic rationales and visions for business schools to aspire towards (Augier and March 2011; Khurana et al. 2011), and as such, the construction of programmatic visions for the field has had a clear US bias in terms of empirical examples, institutional frameworks and traditions guiding the programmatic efforts and perspectives promoted in reports.

The most recent Carnegie Foundation report (Colby et al. 2011) is the as yet most openly programmatic narrative on the necessity of integrating the humanities into management education — the report uses the term ‘liberal arts’. Like the diagnostic and the genealogical narratives analysed earlier, they see the pressing need to counteract the overspecialization and disciplinary single mindedness characteristic of current educational endeavours by broadening the students’ horizons and equipping them not only with instrumental skills for doing business but also to grow into responsible personalities with a clear sense of the needs of society as a whole. The report therefore opens with the emphatic statement that ‘Business has never mattered more’ (Colby et al. 2011: 1), but instead of focusing on the economic necessities of globalization — a point that was stressed heavily by the first Carnegie Report (Pierson 1959) — the authors proceed to expound on the dangers of blundering into the ‘fragile interdependence’ that links the different sectors of the global economy without the skills to recognize and constructively deal with its complexity. On those grounds, they claim that the resulting ‘need to grasp this pluralism of values and contexts is, we believe, a weak link in the current organization of undergraduate business programmes’ (Colby et al. 2011: 5).

In contrast to both the diagnostic and the genealogical narratives, the programmatic narrative, as exemplified by the Carnegie Report, is not content with describing and, in the case of the genealogical narrative, explaining the status quo, but rather it makes a positive case for integrative programmes that include strong liberal arts components. The results are five decisive
recommendations on how to create such programmes, the most striking ones being the last two, which stipulate that on the one hand, the institutions concerned ‘should be intentional in their integration of the arts and sciences and business education’ (Colby et al. 2011: 169) and that the arts and sciences themselves on the other hand should profit from such integration because ‘[b]usiness educators have a great deal to contribute to teaching and learning in the arts and sciences’ (Colby et al. 2011: 170). These two recommendations mirror the main concerns of the report that integration should be firmly anchored on an institutional level – not left to take place more or less incidentally because there happen to be liberal arts available – and also that the liberal arts components should be tailored to meet the needs of management students. The implication of the last recommendation is that liberal arts teachers are not in and of themselves either willing or able to adjust to such tailoring.

Both concerns are at the heart of most of the case studies presented in the report, owing to the realization that if and where the liberal arts already have a place in management education, then this tends to be either accidental or, if institutionalized on any level, perceived by students as an add-on instead of a crucial part of their professional training. To convey these issues, the first chapter of the report presents them in the shape of two distinctive metaphors. The status quo is described as resembling ‘a curricula barbell: each end of the bar carries a significant weight of intellectual subject matter but the connection is slender’ (Colby et al. 2011: 5), whilst for the future the authors ‘envision something more like a double helix’, ‘a metaphor for an undergraduate business curriculum that explicitly and continually links students’ learning of business to their use of various arts and sciences disciplines that provide a larger, complementary view of the world’ (Colby et al. 2011: 6).

Like the terms ‘ideal’ and ‘hero’ in Khurana’s book, these metaphors carry a load of meaning, which might not be relevant to their primary descriptive function to outline the difference between unintegrated and systematically and institutionally integrated curricula, but serves to give a telling impression of what implicit frameworks of values the report’s authors are working with. The metaphor of the barbell implies that a programme that makes its students go through studies in the liberal arts but does not bring both components together is nothing more than a training course to build up muscle, to be gone through for the effect but not an aim in itself and, when over, leaves the pumped-up muscles to deteriorate again. The metaphor of the double helix, in contrast, casts the perfect integration of management and liberal arts components in a shape that suggests the students going through such a programme acquire something like a genetic makeup which not only remains with them ever after but also enables them to pass the knowledge they have acquired on to future generations.

The choice of these two metaphors is curiously ambiguous. Neither of them is taken from either the field of management education or that of the liberal arts; instead, they are linked to the extracurricular activity of fitness training – the barbell – and, in the case of the double helix, to a research field in the natural sciences, which in recent years has been progressing rapidly. It is a field that represents the so-called ‘hard’ sciences as opposed to the ‘soft’ ones like management and liberal arts studies at their most efficient. This seems to suggest that either the latter do not yield any metaphors suitable for encoding the endeavours that the report envisions or, more likely, that its authors by their choice stake the claim that if and when management and liberal arts studies are integrated as well as they hope for, the result will equal the discovery of the double helix, thus finally bringing the ‘soft’ sciences on to the same level of academic and public appreciation which the ‘hard’ sciences – funding-wise often to the detriment of the ‘soft’ ones – have been occupying effortlessly since the end of the nineteenth century.

The self-assurance resonating with the metaphor of the double helix – which, indeed, informs the report’s whole discourse on integrated programmes and curricula – correlates with
the normative quality of the image of the perfect manager that the authors present in their chapter on 'Emerging agendas', that is 'Successful entrepreneurs need a broad, rich knowledge base, the ability to see patterns, an explorer mentality, intellectual flexibility, and a willingness to question basic assumptions – all characteristics of a liberally educated person' (Colby et al. 2011: 157). In at least one instance, this image is at variance with what the report itself puts forward because there are a number of basic assumptions informing it that are not questioned, or at least not elaborated upon. The most important of these assumptions pertains to the disciplinary architecture of current academic education as such. Both the metaphor of the barbell and that of the double helix derive their meaning from a binary structure, suggesting that whatever the future of integrated curricula will be, it will always be that of different fields of knowledge aligned alongside to the purpose of complementing each other – the main question is how to translate between the fields whilst affirming that disciplinary segregation as such is a given of any academic education.

In conclusion, the Carnegie Report can be seen to be a programmatic narrative by virtue of its distinctively normative attitude as to the agenda of future management education, whilst fortifying this attitude throughout by referring to their empirical research on US business schools that are in the process of integrating liberal arts into management education. In contrast to the diagnostic narrative given by Howard et al. (2014), however, Colby et al. (2011) boldly draw conclusions that aim at the practical educational and institutional impact, proclaiming the integration of liberal arts’ expertise into the training of future managers to be a – if not the – solution to the problems faced by business schools’ loss of societal identity and purpose, and that also offer advice on what needs to be done to further this aim. This includes an issue that has as yet rarely been approached: the very practical problem of convincing the faculty teaching the two components to link their endeavours in an effort to create the hoped-for double-helix effect.

Conclusions: reading the future of management education

Taking these reports together, the use of narratological means towards the end of finding answers to the set of questions raised in our introduction appears to be justified. Selecting them for the fact of their already evident and, in the case of the study by Thomas et al. (2014), the expected impact on the future of management education, the core question of how far the chosen reports perform the reality they aim to effect has in part, as mentioned before, been answered in advance. One important and possibly even crucial point to this answer, however, has only become clear through the narratological analysis itself. Taking together the fact of their impact on the one hand and that of all three adhering rather strictly to the logics of their respectively chosen – diagnostic, genealogical, programmatic – type of narrative on the other, there seems to be a close link between those two aspects, suggesting that the recognizably genre–typical conduct of an argument considerably strengthens its powers of persuasion.

This insight might at first seem redundant because any methodology stipulates adherence to once–set rules as a condition for the yielding of convincing results. What is striking, however, in the case of the reports analysed is that although they certainly spell out the way they respectively go about harvesting and interpreting their data, their adherence to the rules of genre–typical narrating throughout remains implicit, even though it distinctly shapes the results’ presentation. All three reports use mainly one of the three types of narrative available, abstaining from options of discursive logics employed by the other two types, but do not explicitly reflect on their narrative dimension, leaving this to be inferred by their performance. On the level of said narrative performance, therefore, it can be argued that the much–cited skills lacking in management education – and to be provided by the humanities and social sciences – are, in fact, already very
much practised by the reports' authors, although they are missing conspicuously on the levels of content and even methodological reflection where quite possibly the conscious and intentional acquisition and employment of those skills by the authors might have yielded – if not different, then at least even more convincing and perhaps practical – results for implementing an integrated education.

This impression is mirrored by the lack of clarity on the exact nature of the humanities' and social sciences' expertise, which is characteristic of all three reports and, on the strength of our selection being that of narratives representing typical examples for the ongoing debate on management education, therefore of the debate itself. Apart from the pervading sense that the humanities' main quality consists of providing morality to a profession which, in light of the recent financial crises, is perceived by the public as amoral, there is no clear concept of what else the humanities and social sciences might add to a successful mix of curricula. With great fervour, critical thinking, multi-framing of problems and cross-cultural savoir faire are proclaimed to be the accomplishments hoped for in future managers, but throughout the debate these formulae remain without the empirical substance that is provided in abundance by any hypothesis on the disciplinary core of management education itself.

Likewise, the cross-fertilization of teaching techniques over disciplinary boundaries, which might be considered one of the crucial challenges of integrating the humanities and social sciences, remains uncharted territory, most notably so in the recommendation that Colby et al. offer to business educators having 'a great deal to contribute to teaching and learning in the arts and sciences' (Colby et al. 2011: 170). This implies that the arts and sciences are a priori deficient in their teaching when it comes to educating management students, whilst business educators have nothing whatsoever to learn from arts and sciences teachers, an implication that stands as unsubstantiated as the recommendation's explicit content.

As it is, it becomes very clear that the problem at the heart of the debate on the integration of the humanities and social sciences is a seemingly insurmountable threshold between proclaiming the need for such integration on the one hand and seriously engaging with the content and thus the types of knowledge taught by both management and the humanities' and social sciences' educators on the other. This problem appears to be a structural one inherent in the system of academic disciplinarity as established in the nineteenth century. Implementing this system, the institution of the modern university reacted to the explosion of knowledge generated by the Enlightenment movement's scientific curiosity: because it was no longer possible for any one human to know even something of everything, let alone all, as the early modern homo universale had aspired to do, the institution responsible for managing this knowledge in both teaching and research compartmentalized into sub-institutional entities in charge of clearly circumscribed smaller fields (see Parker, this volume). What was a reasonable and even smart move in administering limited resources then created structural constraints, which over the years have engendered what is basically an essentialist notion of disciplinary knowledge, that is the notion that there is a canonical core knowledge to each discipline that may not, indeed cannot, be put at the disposition of any kind of integrational endeavour.

This notion, it seems, is still going strong – strong enough at least to restrict even the most fervent advocates' visions of a management education integrating the humanities and social sciences to within the boundaries of their own disciplinary comfort zones. At the same time, the near-elementary dynamics of the debate on the future of management education shows a growing awareness of the fact that present day 'real life' professional challenges in all fields – including the humanities – can no longer be met by educational institutions that still cling to the traditional disciplinary segregation.'We need to engage more deeply with the fundamentals of knowledge', conclude Starkey and Tempest (2008: 385), arguing strongly in favour of what they call the
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‘hybrid vigour’ (2008: 387) of a renewed understanding of management education beyond disciplinary boundaries.

To achieve such an understanding is not the task of one institution or that of one set of disciplines, or those of management education or those of the humanities and social sciences; rather, it needs to grow from the consciousness that the assumptions underlying the academic construct ‘management education’ need to be as carefully reassessed as those underlying the self-image of the humanities and social sciences in order to make way for innovative developments. For management educators on all levels, from business schools’ governing bodies to administrators and teachers, the knowledge of the humanities and social sciences as it has been applied to the field of reporting in this chapter may help towards a first step of such a reassessment – just as it may be helpful to the educators in humanities and social sciences to realize and even to enjoy realizing that humanity’s business is indeed the humanities’ business.

Notes

1 For detailed information on this programme and its history, see Eberle and Metelmann, this volume.
2 This concept still informs part of the current debate today; for the use of the term ‘liberal arts’ in the Carnegie Report see later.

References


