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TRIPLE-ACCREDITED, WORLD-RANKED



# MANAGEMENT EDUCATION IN TURBULENT TIMES

## Introduction

This special section was initiated and curated by us, as members of the British Academy of Management's *Management Knowledge and Education* (MKE) project. MKE is an academy-wide initiative, launched in 2014 to advance the creation and circulation of innovative and transformative research that deepens and broadens our understanding of management knowledge, knowing, education and learning. MKE sets out a framework to support both theory-driven and phenomenon-driven research within and across the wide variety of setting where knowledge generation, learning and management education unfolds. For our members, in common with the authors of the *Journal of Management Education*, the sites of inquiry are varied, ranging anything from the traditional classroom and lecture theatre (cf. Durant, Carlon and Downs 2016, Dyer and Hurd 2016), to organizational setting where researcher-practitioner working spaces generate insights through action-oriented, collaborative research (cf. Cunliffe and Scaratti 2017, Radaelli et al. 2014). Interests extend to educational and learning encounters in virtual and digital spaces, and the use and assemblages of new technologies, forms of expertise and capabilities that are generating new learning experiences (Arbaugh 2000, Martins and Kellermanns 2004). Many of these innovations are responses to the turbulent and rapidly changing management environments that our students and management learners are encountering (see for example, Hibbert 2012, Wright and Katz 2016), which contrasts sharply with the speed and time it often takes to learn and generate transformative insight (Dean and Forray 2018). Our aim then is to support our community in striving to understand management learning and education *however and wherever it happens* in these turbulent times.

## Turbulent Times in the Higher Education Context for Business Schools

Turbulence: *A state of conflict or confusion* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018)

The timing of the MKE initiative is no accident. It emerges in a context of critical commentaries concerning the Higher Education (HE) landscape which are proving unsettling for many institutions.<sup>i</sup> In the US and UK in particular there are increasing political concerns about the cost of HE, and who accesses, pays for and profits from it. These concerns have led some commentators to question the relevance of skill sets developed in universities, the power of these skill sets to open up job opportunities for graduates, and the capabilities of HE institutions to support workplace transition (Craig 2017). In the UK, these types of concerns have already resulted in a new regulatory framework. On 27<sup>th</sup> April 2017, the UK passed the Higher Education and Research Act, creating an Office for Students with a responsibility to further develop the regulatory framework to deal with such issues.<sup>ii</sup> For some, the very value of management education is in question, for others the value is much clearer (Bennis and O'Toole 2005).

In the context of this debate, in a recent article in Times Higher Education (Cameron 2017), the Vice Chancellor of Aston University urges us to rethink the role of business and management schools within universities and argues that we can no longer afford to view business schools as a ‘cash cow’. Drawing on trends observed at UK and Australian HE institutions, Cameron argues that the value of business schools lies in the impact and engagement that business and management academics generate with extra-institutional agencies and actors:

*“...greater recognition of research impact beyond its academic impact... is a natural strength for business schools and their engagement with business often opens the doors for engagement from other disciplines in the university.”* (Alec Cameron, VC Aston University)

Developing links between business and management schools through what is often referred to as the ‘real world engagement’ or ‘knowledge exchange’ activities is becoming critical as these external stakeholders are increasingly recognized as not just the beneficiaries of HE provision but increasingly as co-creators of valued management knowledge, theory and practice (Beech, MacIntosh and MacLean 2010). Knowledge exchange is also an important consideration for most research funding agencies. In the Knowledge Exchange and Research Council institutes report (Hughes et al. 2016), for example, 70% of the 600 respondents surveyed reported engagement with external organizations, with 40% of respondents spending at least 10% of their time engaged in knowledge exchange activities. On average staff reported spending 8% of their work time on engagement in knowledge exchange activities with external organizations.<sup>iii</sup> While these findings extend beyond the field of management, they act as a useful benchmark for our field as a key concern here is commercialization, economization and capitalizations of scientific knowledge – all central areas of expertise within the management field. The criticality of funding for the engagement and impact program and to the rethinking of what management education might look like, and how and where management education might happen in the future, is further amplified in the UK context by Brexit. Brexit threatens to remove important streams of research and engagement funding from the UK HE sector. As Angus Laing, Dean, Lancaster University Business School observed in the HE forum WONKHE<sup>iv</sup>,

*“...Business schools have been successful in securing funding to support SME development from the private sector, whether in the form of bank funding such as the Goldman Sachs 10000 small businesses programme, or in the form of BAE Systems support for innovation in their SME supply chain. However, such funding cannot support the wider range of business support activities which business schools are distinctively well placed to delivery.”* (Laing 2017)

We argue that the impact agenda offers new opportunities for management education: new opportunities to consider *how and where* management education and learning can be best situated, offering opportunities to develop innovative forms of learning that speak to both the turbulent environment of HE and the inextricably linked turbulent business environment, of

which management education is so much a part. In what was a the time considered by some as a shocking argument, Bennis and O'Toole (2005: 96) claim that for a while Business Schools have been on the wrong track. For them, the 'crisis' in management education can be traced to a dramatic shift in the culture of business schools:

*“During the past several decades, many leading business schools have quietly adopted an inappropriate –and ultimately self-defeating –model of academic excellence. Instead of measuring themselves in terms of the competence of their graduates, or by how well their faculties understand important drivers of business performance, they measure themselves almost solely by the rigor of their scientific research. They have adopted a model of science that uses abstract financial and economic analysis, statistical multiple regressions, and laboratory psychology. Some of the research produced is excellent, but because so little of it is grounded in actual business practices, the focus of graduate business education has become increasingly circumscribed –and less and less relevant to practitioners.”*

An outcome of this shift has been the need to persuade a jury of sophisticated peers (McCloskey 1983) of the merits of a scholarly publication at the expense of making research accessible to managers. Today, few practicing managers find management research presented in a form that they find useful (Markides 2011). In a recent Special Issue on 'Impact and Management Research' in the British Journal of Management, MacIntosh et al. (2017) argue that the field of management would make serious gains by seeking to explore and exploit the integrated nature of education, practice, research and scholarship, and that our field has much to learn from other disciplines such as art, education and nursing where practice, research and scholarship are more overtly interwoven. In the same SI, (Anderson, Ellwood and Coleman 2017) question the way the 'gap' between researchers and practitioners is understood and show how a more equal relationship (Bartunek and Rynes 2014) can be created through 'relational management education'. Their approach builds a community of inquirers by reassembling the various actors and activities in and associated with business schools: publication, researcher-educators, teachers of full- and part-time students, future and current practitioners, and executive educationalists and consultancies. The crucial factor is that all such activities are undertaken in a scholarly fashion – that is, that they foster critical thinking rather than technical or instrumental training or application of ideas. The focus then becomes the co-creation of ideas, the challenging of existing ideas and practices and a willingness to disrupt and experience discomfort while learning. Such approaches are opening up opportunities for us to generate new understandings about what management practitioners do with the theories and management tools we equip them with, how they come to work out what is worth doing and what is valuable to them and their work (Mason, Kjellberg and Hagberg 2014).

A key challenge for our community is therefore in making knowledge exchange and collaboration connections work well for educators, learners and their respective institutions

and organizations. But this is less than straightforward. Evans and Plewa (2016) discuss the challenges that Australian business schools have faced in attempting to do this, evidencing their claim with the Australia's poor performance at 72<sup>nd</sup> in the world 'Innovation Efficiency Ratio' rankings: a measure comparing innovation inputs to outputs. In a survey of 850 academics in South Australia, Evans and Plewa (2016) found that 33% of respondents said that engaging with end users is difficult, that they don't have relevant skills, or personal contacts or that it would detract them from undertaking other research. It seems that while academics do want to engage, they need more institutional support to enable them to do so. One such example of this can be found in the University of Surrey's Centre for Management Learning that aims to bring academia and practice closer together.

In many ways, the MKE initiative is a reaction to this changing and turbulent environment. The British Academy of Management and the MKE initiative in particular, has become concerned with how these concerns are being discussed and addressed in different forums. It is also a response to calls from our community for learned societies to have a louder voice in shaping the policy debates, unfolding understanding of scholarship in policy-making and non-HE arenas, and critically, to support and celebrate the innovations and improvements the practice of management education so often generates. By arguing that these three elements - policy, scholarship and practice of management education - are mutually reinforcing rather than operating in isolation, we think our community has much to gain and is well positioned to influence a holistic, cohesive and coordinated effort to make progress. We argue that by exploring the relationships between social and economic value we can develop, more effectively, management education that works for the varied stakeholders that constitute our management communities. We have explored, earlier, some of the tensions within those relationships, and we acknowledge that a sense of dissonance can also allow genuine innovation to be achieved in ways that also justify effort and investment in better management scholarship and education (cf. Stark 2009).

This special section represents an intervention to take a first innovative step on our journey: to encourage and develop scholarship that both reflects and influences the turbulent policy and practice contexts in the field of management education. Paying due regard to the breadth of those contexts, we are delighted that BAM's international membership is reflected in this special section on *Management Education in Turbulent Times*.

### **Turbulent Times in the Broader Socio-Economic Context**

We introduced this special section by considering what turbulence means for the HE sector and for the business and management field in particular. Yet the idea for this special section came about in late 2016 at a time of unanticipated political schisms and following a series of world events that presented themselves as unsettling juxtapositions – and widely addressed in the media through a business and management practice lens. This lens repeatedly illustrated the inseparability of social and economic values. In multiple politic arenas, extreme views became popular and were legitimized through the ballot box, leading to divisions in opinion that were characterized by acrimony and recrimination; the election of Donald Trump and the

UK's Brexit vote have dramatically changed western politics and are raising questions about the world order and global trade. In the preceding year, a modern diaspora in the shape of the Syrian refugee crisis saw sunbathers on Greek beaches witnessing the arrival, in dinghies, of desperate families trying to find safe haven from the murderous conditions of their homeland. The divide between the world's richest and poorest people continued to grow to the extent that it now takes four days for the chief executive of one of the world's five largest fashion retailers to earn as much as a Bangladeshi garment worker will earn in his or her lifetime (Oxfam 2017).

Despite reports in 2017 that a global recession was likely, the economic forecast now appears to be more optimistic (Behravesch 2018) and the threats of a repeat of the financial crisis of ten years ago have dissipated. However, there are still questions about the neoliberalist and free market capitalist model upon which this growth is based, in particular, how it affects the weakest members of society and its role in engendering extreme political views because of its potential to create turbulence and shocks such as those of 2008 (see Bridgman et al. in this issue). As the wider backdrop to all of this, our natural environment is no longer stable, with climate change cited as the biggest threat faced by the world with its attendant economic and social implications (WWF 2018).

These political, economic, social and environmental conditions all have a significant impact on organizations and on managers in particular. In the period of development of the papers in this section, there have been numerous high-profile events that have made many of us question whether organizations are managed in the way we might have once thought. For example, Facebook users who benignly and unknowingly offered up their personal details have learned that their data may have been harvested to target voters in the 2016 US presidential election and possibly in the referendum that led to Brexit (Greenfield 2018); the #MeToo movement has exposed widespread sexual harassment in Hollywood and beyond and there are accounts of aid workers sexually abusing children in the aftermath of the earthquakes in Haiti (Dearden 2018). These events, along with many others, have raised questions about the way in which work is defined, how it should be conducted and the power relationships that underpin it.

In the midst of what appears to be a moral crisis, companies are under pressure to manage the triple bottom line and justify corporate behaviour by evaluating environmental, social and governance performance (Elkington 1997, Tamimi and Sebastianelli 2017). Hahn et al. (2014: 466) suggest that organizations need 'to address multiple desirable but conflicting economic, environmental and social outcomes at firm and societal levels that operate in different time frames and follow different logics'. This in turn creates a number of tensions for managers charged with corporate sustainability that emanate from having to make choices between business and values, long-term and short-term goals (Carollo and Guerci 2018). Managers at every level and in every discipline have always dealt with a certain degree of messiness but as we look forward to the third decade of the twenty first century, this messiness is overlaid with a stronger sense of unpredictability (Roberts 2000, Van Bueren, Klijjn and Koppenjan 2003). This means that managers are likely to be dealing with 'wicked',

intractable and ill-defined issues and problems as a matter of course, in an environment that is characterized by conflict and confusion, in other words, turbulence.

## **The Role of Management Educators**

The question we posed as a starting point for this special section was: *As educators, what should we be doing, and helping future managers learn how to do, to deal with turbulent times?* We have argued that business schools and management educators are in a unique position to influence current and future managers to both respond to and initiate change in the face of societal change because it manifests itself strongly in organizational life. Managers' actions and the values that underpin them have become increasingly pivotal in the everyday work of colleagues and the long-term futures of colleagues and stakeholders. In 2016 the British Academy of Management, in conjunction with the Higher Education Academy (now named Advance HE) carried out a study asking management education practitioners how they understood the challenges they faced in the future (Bulman 2015, Mason 2016). The findings were published in a White Paper, 'Innovating Learning and Teaching for Excellence in Management' (Mason 2016). Many of the issues raised in that report have been discussed above; but one of the more surprising findings was that respondents told us that those publishing in the management education area are often not recognized by their institutions as key contributors to the field. In response, this SI demonstrates and celebrates the dexterity and creativity inherent in the scholarship of management education. It recognizes the plurality of approaches that are potentially useful for addressing the contemporary challenges and criticisms of management education and we think it illustrates the valuable contributions of scholars in field, dealing with contemporary management practice issues. We highlighted three approaches in particular:

### ***Using management theories to characterize and understand the nature of turbulence***

Recent research approaches to characterizing and addressing turbulence include work that is focused on industry turbulence and contingency theory (Karim, Carroll and Long 2016), environmental uncertainty and responses to it, based on resource dependency (Bogers, Boyd and Hollensen 2015), and exploration of how inter- and intra-organizational networks provide resilience and a basis for organizational innovation in crisis circumstances (Lundberg, Andresen and Törnroos 2016). We see value in management educationalists taking up these kinds of research in the classroom as part of conventional management education classes. Understanding the different forms that turbulence takes, the strategies and approaches managers have adopted to overcome challenges and seek out and create innovative opportunities for collective action in times of turbulence seems particularly pertinent to the demands made on and for reflexive managers, who are able to learn from, react to and quickly reassemble new, productive futures.

### ***Developing new curricula, content and educational processes to fit the changing times***

Management educators have already given some thought to the content and processes, in and out of the classroom, that are appropriate for changing times. Interesting recent examples include re-examination of the case method and the legitimacy of business schools (Bridgman, Cummings and McLaughlin 2016), integrating sustainability issues and study abroad experiences in the curriculum in order to develop globally aware, responsible managers (Pesonen 2003, Sroufe et al. 2015, Viswanathan 2012), developing management



classes around emerging educational approaches such as threshold concepts (Burch et al. 2015, Hibbert and Cunliffe 2015, Wright and Gilmore 2012, Yip and Raelin 2012), and employing critical approaches that challenge the status quo (Kark, Preser and Zion-Waldoks 2016).

### ***Developing adaptive, reflexive approaches to support personal resilience and flexibility***

There may be a need for both students and educators to develop resilience in turbulent times, but resilience can take many forms. Practically, organizational and personal resilience are argued to be related, and rely on ‘soft skills’ as well as adequate resources to enable change (Richtnér and Löfsten 2014). However, there needs to be some concern for how this feeds into moral decision making if our responses to turbulence are not to involve a ‘race to the bottom’. Ethical resilience builds on critically reflexive understandings of the existential, relational and moral character of leadership and management (Cunliffe 2004, Cunliffe 2016), so that one is aware of the need to change while remaining aware of the consequences and effects of change on others. Focusing these insights more clearly on management education may require developments of critical pedagogies and multidisciplinary approaches, especially if we expect students to be adaptive and creative in the face of complex challenges and, perhaps, also agents of *positive* social change (Dehler 2009, Welsh and Dehler 2013).

Inherent in all three of these approaches (and in the papers that are included in the special section) is the notion that business schools should consider the ways in which managers engage with knowledge in order to develop new ways of framing wicked, complex and perplexing problems (Dewey 1938). Complex situations require managers to develop ‘complicated understanding’ to increase the variety of ways in which situations can be understood (Bartunek, Gordon and Weathersby 1983). However, recent moves in the university sector in the UK, most markedly, the introduction of student fees and the introduction of league tables of everything remotely measurable in HE, has resulted in ‘consumers’ of higher education being encouraged and led to expect that the main purpose of studying for a degree is to command a higher salary on completion than would have been possible without the qualification. This had led to an increasing marketization of the management classroom, where knowledge is viewed as a commodity that will produce a positive return on investment, rather than the outcome of the development of scholar-practitioners who approach their work with insight, good judgment and an orientation to problematizing before problem-fixing. This is another of those unsettling juxtapositions that we alluded to earlier, and one that affects management educators on a daily basis.

We are particularly keen in this issue to emphasize the centrality of a situated and critical view of knowledge in learning about business and management. Knowledge understood this way is not just a problem-solving tool or commodity, but as an evolving resource; as learners are ‘struck’ (Cunliffe 2002: 42) by changes in contexts, they develop the skills of judgment and resilience that allow knowledge to be reconfigured, reframed and reconceptualized. This is the kind of knowledge and associated reflexive learning approach that managers require in a world that changes quickly, in surprising and sometimes shocking ways. We summarize the

potential ways in which this reflexive learning approach can be developed in response, in Table 1, after which we introduce the contributions to this Special Section.

		<b>Aspects of Turbulent Environments</b>		
		<b>Political</b>	<b>Social-Economic</b>	<b>Scientific-Technological</b>
<b>Developing Responsive and Resilient Management Education</b>	<b>Characterizing Turbulent Contexts</b> (see: Günther, Hillmann, Duchek and Meyr, this issue)	Explore the plausibility of extreme social movements	Consider alternative paradigms and ethical failures	Use future-scoping and imagination
	<b>Developing New Educational Content</b> (see: Bridgman, McLaughlin and Cummings, this issue)	Situate evolving ideas in their (ideological) history	Link economic and social factors within an ethical framework	Ground theory specifically but enable use speculatively
	<b>Innovation in Curriculum Development and Delivery</b> (see: Schumacher and Mayer, this issue)	Encourage collaborative and informed student engagement	Situate student engagement in a responsible business model / framework	Enable a creative design approach to problem framing and solving
	<b>Outcomes: situating adaptive and reflexive personal learning</b>	<i>Enable students to be informed knowledgeable agents</i>	<i>Engage students critically in the analysis of business contexts</i>	<i>Empower student creativity as a means of responsive resilience</i>

**Table 1: A framework for reflexive learning in turbulent times.**

As we indicate in Table 1, the papers in this Special Section overlap – to some degree – with the contributory processes that can lead to responsive and resilient management education in times characterized by political, socio-economic and technological turbulence. We now go on to introduce those papers in more detail.

### **The Papers in this Special Section**

Bridgman, McLaughlin and Cummings present a way of using the case method underpinned by principles of critical management education and drawing on arguments that question the legitimacy of management education that is almost universally based on a neoliberal worldview. In particular, they discuss how the case method, ‘the dominant mode of management education for a century’ with its narrow focus on solving problems, can continue to be meaningful when the capitalist structure that dictates the way in which firms operate is under scrutiny. They propose a reflexive role for theory as a means of enabling learners to appreciate a range of views and to understand the broader context of management work. They argue that theory should play a greater role than simply providing a tool for problem solving. They explain how they have used theoretical tools from sociology, political economy, law and industrial relations to unpack the complex relationship between business and society and to offer a set of ‘conceptual lenses’ to work on complex cases. In the conclusion, the paper points to the need to fundamentally rethink the relationship between business and society and to re-examine the role of business schools in order ‘to seize the

window of opportunity that turbulent times present'. The use of theories from outside mainstream management writing provides an opportunity for learners to construct new frames of reference and to question the underlying economic, political and social structures within which organizations and managers operate.

Günther, Hillmann, Duchek, and Meyr's contribution addresses the manager's role in creating organizational resilience in times of turbulence. They argue that strategic management education teaches outdated frameworks that do not equip managers to deal with the complex environment in which they operate and that they need to develop personal resilience in the face of such challenges. They also stress that managers must learn to deal with uncertainty and complexity, to think creatively and become critically reflexive managers. They describe an intervention in which they help MBA students acquire the knowledge and skills required in effective scenario planning using a case-based method and experiential learning. However, one group had received input on scenario planning whilst another, control group had not. They recorded the interactions of both on video in order to analyze group processes and outcomes and found that the group that understood how to use scenario planning had a clear vision of their aims and experienced less intra-group conflict than the group that did not. They were also more creative, acknowledged ambiguity and became 'strategic bricoleurs'. As in Bridgman et al.'s paper, Gunther et al. also show how theoretically informed questions, in this case underpinned by knowledge of scenario planning, can help strategic decision making and lead to greater insight. Furthermore, they also show how theory and its clear positioning in pedagogical design can develop relevant competencies.

Schumacher and Mayer also construct a model for teaching around a particular theory. They argue that design thinking helps students prepare to work in turbulent contexts and that its use also creates opportunities for innovation. They offer a conceptual paper with detailed accounts and illustrations of how they teach the core principles of design thinking. Their perspective on turbulence proposes that it is due to technological innovations, business model changes and shifting consumer habits that require managers to be able to solve problems and to move from what they call a traditional *decision-making* attitude to a *design-creating* attitude. They also build on Bicen and Johnson's (2015) work in lean manufacturing and innovation which offers the idea of managers working as bricoleurs with scarce resources and relying on market feedback in order to solve wicked problems. The paper draws on a very current literature to explain the generative potential of design thinking in encouraging students to frame problems as though they were designers and offer two ways of teaching design thinking; an introductory session covering *Design Thinking in One Hour* and a two and a half day exercise, all with examples from their own practice and based on a set of teachable principles.

## **Conclusion**

Our two main conclusions are that: (i) we have only scratched the surface of our Special Section theme; and (ii) further wide-ranging and collaborative work will be necessary in

order to continue to develop management education to support responsiveness and resilience in turbulent times that show little sign of stabilizing. Bearing in mind the importance we place on further collaboration, it is important to acknowledge the collaborative context of our won endeavor. Accordingly, we would like to thank the contributors to this Special Section, for helping us to open up an initial conversation about how management education can respond to turbulent times. It is perhaps symptomatic of these turbulent times that there were eighteen further contributions that did not make it to the Special Section, some of which took a broader position and others that were at a more exploratory stage of development than our editorial timelines could accommodate. Nevertheless, we hope that all those developing contributions will find their place in the right part of the debate in due course, and we are grateful for the challenges they already contributed to our thinking. In addition, we recognize that useful innovation often builds on solid foundations; in this case, the long and continuing history of leadership in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning that underpins the prominence of the *Journal of Management Education*. So, above all, we are grateful to the Editors-in-Chief of the journal for providing a home for our conversation, and for their support in helping us to bring it to a (temporary!) conclusion.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/role-business-schools-within-universities>

<sup>ii</sup> On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2017, Sir Michael Barber, incoming chair of the new Office for Students, gave his inaugural speech at Universities UK. The OfS is the new regulator for higher education in England and it is due to be established formally from April 2018. In the context of the recently passed Higher Education and Research Act 2017 Higher Education and Research Act 2017r education in England and it is due to be established formally from April 2018. ties UK. o as the 'jewel in the nation's crown'. Read the speech: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Documents/sir-michael-barber-speech-uuk-june-2017.pdf>; See video <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/sir-michael-barber-speech-uuk-june-2017.aspx>

<sup>iii</sup> The National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) is an independent and not-for-profit membership organisation that promotes, develops and supports university-business collaboration across the UK. The National Centre's **Council**, is constituted from senior business leaders and Vice-to review and make recommendations on the UK's long-term skills, graduate talent and innovation needs, to deliver collaborative thinking on the big issues of sustainable growth and industrial strategy, and strengthen understanding with government and policy-makers through high level networking. <http://ncub.co.uk/reports/knowledge-exchange-and-research-council-institutes.html>

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<sup>iv</sup> Founded in 2011, Wonkhe ‘is the home of higher education wonks’: those who work in and around universities and anyone interested and engaged in higher education policy, people and politics. Their mission is to improve policymaking in higher education and provide a platform for the new or previously unheard voices and perspectives in the sector. <https://wonkhe.com/about-us/>