

BRITISH ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

SYMPOSIUM: CALL FOR PAPERS

IF WE TAUGHT MANAGERS LIKE WE TEACH DOCTORS...

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There has been a lot of discussion on the nature of management. Is it an art or a profession? Those that believe it is a profession (e.g. Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Trank & Rynes, 2003) argue that there is a scientific base to the subject that is applicable across contexts. However, those who believe that it is an art (e.g. Mintzberg, 1987; Spender, 2007) argue that there is little evidence showing that (1) the training of management students is related to their performance, and (2) management research is poorly related to practice. For example, Pfeffer and Fong (2002) note a lack of evidence that possessing an MBA degree is correlated with individual career success. These authors also found that 'there is little evidence that business school research is influential on management practice, calling into question the professional relevance of management scholarship' (2002:78). In another line of criticism of 'management as profession', Mintzberg (2004) has argued that 'knowledge about context is not as portable in management as it is in education or engineering or in medicine' (2004:12) thereby suggesting that the usefulness of the abstract teaching of context-free theories is limited. Rather than being about the application of a scientific evidence base, Bennis and O'Toole (2005) have proposed that most issues facing senior managers require judgment rather than analysis. Despite these criticisms, most teaching of management in most business schools remains wedded to the transfer of knowledge about management. In short, most management teaching is about 'know why' rather than 'know how'.

Undergraduate management courses are typically three years in duration; almost all of which is delivered in classroom settings. The contact time between students and faculty is amongst the lowest of mainstream disciplines in universities. Full-time MBAs have higher attendance demands, but are usually delivered in the sterile setting of the lecture theatre and the seminar room. Part-time MBA, often termed 'Executive MBAs', typically differ from full-time MBAs by the use of reflective practice whereby the students learn new ideas and theories at evening classes, 'take them to work next day' and then reflect upon the effectiveness of them in subsequent study time. Even this approach to teaching a practical subject is a far cry from the ways in which other professions (e.g. doctors, dentists, pharmacists, vets, architects, engineers, psychiatrists, opticians) are taught at undergraduate and masters levels.

In many ways, doctors are similar to managers. They must recognise problems, diagnose causes, proscribe remedies and monitor outcomes. And just like managers, the decisions of doctors can have considerable impact on people and their lives. But the training of doctors is considerably different to the training of managers. Doctors will typically study for five years followed by two foundation years in a hospital rotating between disciplines as a junior doctor.

Moving through the ranks requires further study and examinations to pass. Doctors are typically taught with a wide variety of methods including lectures, practical hands-on sessions (e.g. dissections, role plays), simulations, expert sessions, rotations and placements. More recently, there has been a growing interest in introducing healthcare professionals to systems improvement techniques, which have originated from operational management. It is interesting that medicine is adopting an educational approach from management; might management adopt educational techniques from medicine?

The conceit in this symposium is to wonder what management education would look like if we modelled it on the teaching of doctors. What would the curriculum look like? How would we teach it? Where would the teaching take place? What would the attendance demands be? How would we assess students? What outcomes would we hope for? What would the implications for faculty be? Would it influence management research? In exploring these issues, we hope to reflect on the question of whether or not management might be considered a profession.

Getting Involved

If you are interested in participating in this symposium, please contact the organisers:

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Our symposium submission must be completed by the end of February. If you are interested in being involved, we will need an abstract (about a page in length) outlining what you would like to talk about. We would love to hear from you.

References

Bennis, W. G. & O'Toole, J. 2005. How business schools lost their way. *Harvard Business Review*, 83(5): 96-104.

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Spender, J. 2007. Management as a regulated profession: An essay. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 16(1): 32-42.

Trank, C. Q. & Rynes, S. L. 2003. Who moved our cheese: Reclaiming professionalism in business education. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 2(2): 189-205.