

# Editorial

## From organisation to community?

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OVER the past six months, the fall-out from the credit crunch has not only led to the collapse of many established business and financial institutions, but has spread to cover all aspects of society. In the UK, even the government has not been spared, with the media attention focusing on MPs expenses. The collapse and recriminations are growing to pandemic proportions as the salaries of the BBC, and expenses of those in the police force are coming under the gaze of the media, and the role and funding of public services has been questioned alongside growing apathy towards traditional political parties. This issue of *Interconnections* offers an analysis of how some of this has come about, but also offers up some alternatives to managerial practice and education within the current crisis conditions.

One of the main fallouts from this shift in *zeitgeist* is the growing dissatisfaction with the existing role of business schools, which are the obvious candidate to blame for the economic tsunami that has hit the global economy. The current perception is that business schools have produced a generation of ex-MBAs, equipped with quasi-academic models and an understanding of how markets work but little else. Whilst, in many ways, this is a disingenuous representation, this most recent criticism is the latest instalment in an ongoing attack on business schools.

Within academia, there has been a long running debate, and criticism, of business schools in relation to research and their reason for existence. This has been a two-pronged attack. On the one hand, traditional disciplines (social sciences and the sciences) see business schools as lacking academic credibility. At best, they are perceived as pseudo-social science departments. This attack is the least of the problems. More damaging is the criticism emerging from the business community and from leading lights in the management discourse.

According to many there is a significant ‘relevance gap’ between what business requires and what business academics research and deliver. This has led management gurus, such as Bennis (2009) and Mintzberg (2004), to question the value of management research and education generally. The growing belief is that business schools, once the cash cow for most universities, are seen as facing a crisis. This crisis being reflective of a lack of relevance and the negative impact they have exercised on management practice. Of the many issues this gives rise to for business schools, two are central. First, what should the role of management education be? Second, what new business models are required to ensure that the lessons from the past are learnt?

Regarding management education and research generally, there is a growing awareness of the necessity to widen the focus and shift away from the blinkered perspective that has afflicted management as a discourse. As Moll and Birkinshaw (2008) contend, this requires a focus on innovations in management practice itself. This implies the need for a fundamental rethink of what is delivered and how it is delivered. As business and business organisations have largely replaced the nation state as the key players in the global economy, this now needs to be reflected in the breadth of management education and research. No longer is it acceptable to churn out business students who have studied the rhetoric and memorised the models, rather it is imperative that students emerge as individuals who challenge and innovate the system, adding critical value to business rather than merely commentating upon it. Business schools, for their part, need to tap into the changing values of emerging generations to provide a holistic education that creates future leaders who will not only understand the world, but know how to change it.

Regarding what new business models are required to ensure that the lessons from the past are learnt, it is now clear that we are living through a period where the way of thinking about business and its associated models are being washed away. This Kuhnian paradigm shift in thinking, ‘cannot draw its power from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself [however] before it has stripped itself of all superstitions concerning the past.’ (Marx). Letting go of the past and creating a more holistic management paradigm is critical because what we have been following is a *‘set of principles laid down more than two centuries ago*

*[which] has shaped the structure, management and performance of businesses throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries... the time has come to retire those principles and to adopt a new set’* (Hammer and Champy).

During this age of transition, little is set in stone. This presents business schools with a major opportunity to provide a roadmap for the future and create the frameworks and thinking that will allow business to deliver. This, and earlier issues of *Interconnections*, marks a significant opening of, and contribution to, a long overdue debate, not only about the future of business schools, but by implication, the future of business and society generally.

To this end, we have deliberately sought widely in offering up some reflections from both within, and without, business schools. We open with a debate about the nature of systemic power, and how this impacts on creating the social structures that we are now challenging. In the ‘Views from the Ivory Tower’ section John Nirenberg shows how our actions are influenced by power structures, even to the extent that we commit at best unethical actions, at worst violence to ourselves and others. Taking up a similar theme, but in a different way, Andy Armitage and Alan Thornton, from Anglia Ruskin University, explore the possibility of ‘narratives’ in organisations, and by doing so, show how much is missing from our everyday contacts with colleagues. By actually communicating at depth, we gain much better insights into the systemic nature of our institutions, and therefore could change them in a meaningful and positive way. Colleen McLaughlin, from the Faculty of Education in Cambridge, discusses whether the managerialism that has crept into the curricula and structures of secondary school education, has helped or hindered the progress and real wellbeing of our younger students, and what the effects are likely to be for future managers.

In ‘Views from the Field’, Jon Smith shows how issues of spirituality have impregnated that most seemingly unspiritual of institutions, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). We have, it seems something to learn from their efforts at humanising and expanding the approach to management taken here. In contrast, David Saunders, environmental entrepreneur, offers his reflections on his own personal journey, and how this has offered some roadmaps for sustainability. Finally, in an interview with Mae Chee Sansanee Sthirasuta from Thailand, co-chair of the Global Peace

Initiative for Women, alternative possibilities for education are offered. In these times of rapid and intense change, she discusses the role of women in the workforce, and how their potential for world peace can be encouraged and developed, offering up a significant contribution to the issue of gender, which seems to have disappeared from many of our debates.

In the research and practice section, we highlight initiatives around the globe from managerial, economic and leadership perspectives, and coming with it the nature and challenges of the call for action in these initiatives. One of the linking themes in these debates is the need for collaborative learning and action, and with it a call for community. Whatever section of the globe, or discipline, this is being recognised as a pre-requisite for radical change. However, after many years of industrialised capitalism, with its emphasis on growth, we seem to have forgotten how to form communities, unless they are created by an exchange of money – and businesses are ‘in the business’ of creating money. So here we have a paradox. Yet, this, it seems, is also one of the important challenges that we have to understand – how to live and work with the nature of paradox – something that is far removed from the rather linear and rational models of the business school!

We present a dialogue between some of the participants and organisers following from the 2nd Buddhist Economics conference, held in April this year, about the models of community that were presented here, and whether and how these would work in more industrialised countries, and this is followed by an example of how new business communities are being formed in the US in the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE) networks.

Finally, in a reflection on the issues raised, Bronwen Rees suggests a new form of management practice – ‘holistic inquiry’ as a potential form of individual and collective practice that may enable us to think and work more systemically, and thereby maintain and sustain us as we move through this period of transition, hopefully towards the creation of more humane and intelligent structures and systems.

#### References

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## Section 1

# Views from the ivory tower

In this section, we explore different aspects and **contexts** to a revitalised **management practice**. John Nirenberg shows the mechanisms of **systemic power** and the implications for managerial change. Colleen McLaughlin shows hows **managerialism** commodifies education, and Andy Armitage and Alan Thornton discuss the benefits of ‘**personal narratives**’ in organisation.