

## The Universities and Management Training

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(Read before the Society in Belfast on Monday, January 26th, 1959)

The post-war years have seen a significant increase in the attention given to the problems of business management and to the devising of courses covering a wide variety of subjects but all subsumed under the general heading of management or administration and all purporting to offer useful training to those looking forward, or already in, executive positions in business. A recently published British Institute of Management conspectus lists nearly 200 such courses in the United Kingdom, most of them run by the technical colleges. In addition, many large firms have their own training programmes. The B.I.M. and its counterpart in Dublin, the Irish Management Institute, play their part by co-ordinating these activities, by stimulating interest and by disseminating thought and literature on management principles and practice.

The courses offered are extremely varied in their scope and in their objects. Catering, as most of them do, for people already occupying managerial positions, they are generally of short duration and part-time. Many are highly specialised and concerned with particular aspects or techniques of management; work study, personnel, office organisation, communication, etc. There are, in addition, several full-time undergraduate and graduate courses, generally extending over a year and leading to a certificate. Most of these can best be described as training *for* management rather than training *in* management and their context follows fairly closely the suggestions made by the Urwick Report on "Education for Management" (1947).

A report prepared by the Sheffield Junior Chamber of Commerce in 1958 gives an analysis of the courses provided in Great Britain. These are classified in three broad groups: Senior Executive, Junior Executive (often taking the form of a diploma in business administration) and Foreman and Supervisor. There are ten in the first category, sixty in the second, some lasting only a few weeks, others extending over a year, and thirty-two in the third. Not included in this classification are many short refresher and other specialised courses and also the distinctive work done by the Administrative Staff College at Henley, by the Centre for Management Studies at the Royal College of Science and Technology, Glasgow, and by Sheffield University. Some universities, too, Leeds and Birmingham (and now Cambridge) offer full-time technological courses which include a study of administration.

Progress there certainly has been, but there are many, especially perhaps those concerned with the subject at the universities, who

feel dissatisfied. For them there would seem to be two gaps in the broad advance, the universities themselves and the higher ranks of established management. The blunt fact remains that there is still a long way to go before management studies can be said to be firmly established along with other disciplines in the universities and before more than a small minority of practising managers can be said to have accepted the idea that the subject can be usefully taught.

The predominant attitude of both groups is one of disbelief or, at best, "Wait and see." For the business man who has reached the top without any such training and who in ascending the ladder has had to rely on his own skill and judgment, management remains a mystique, a flair : this, in spite of the fact that many of them are continually testifying that practical experience alone is no longer really adequate in these days of rapid change and equally rapid advance. There have been many such utterances in recent years, some sincere, others, one suspects, little more than paying lip-service to appropriate sentiments on appropriate occasions. A recent speech by Lord Chandos to the Institute of Directors deserves mention, for his remarks included a direct challenge to the universities to do much more in this field, even to the point of awarding degrees in business management.

Some go further and maintain that the days of the "intuitive" managers are numbered. They see the manager as a professional who must have the standards of efficiency and public service that go with his status, standards which are best developed by the systematic study of principles and the acquisition of knowledge not only of business techniques but also of society itself. An American writer, R. J. Cordiner ("New Frontiers for Professional Managers") is worth quoting on this point.

"The work of managing is tending to become professional as a distinct kind of work in itself. It is becoming a job that requires a great amount of specialised thought, effort and training in the principles as well as the techniques of managing. For the manager has the challenging task of getting results through the work of other men and women, rather than directly by his own effort. This professional approach requires, in fact, a dedication of the man's self and service not only to the owners of the business through his board of directors, but also as a steward to the company's customers, its industry, its employers and to the community at large. The professional manager must consciously place the best-balanced interests of these ahead of his own personal interests. The corporate manager to-day thus has an opportunity and an obligation for service comparable to the highest tradition of any service in the past."

Others would question such an enlargement of the functions and responsibilities of management, arguing that any attempt to transform modern managers into Adam Smith's "philosophers of industry" would weaken resolve and introduce a Hamlet-like quality into decisions which should be direct and unequivocal.

A more immediate and down-to-earth pre-occupation of management to-day arises out of the increasing size and ramification of the business firm, a trend which is likely to be accentuated by

technological advances and by freer trading arrangements between countries. These open up new vistas for business enterprise but they mean also changes in business organisation; the enlarging of some departments, the regrouping of others and the creation of new levels of authority and new management positions.

The questions that are being increasingly asked are whether a managerial job is a logical progression for someone who has done well in the lower (non-managerial) rungs of the ladder, whether the functional specialist (whatever his speciality) is necessarily the man for such a job and whether (this one *sotto voce*) some form of university training in management might not help to produce the enquiring, creative and all-round mind required in management.

Such questionings are at present little more than ripples in a sea of calm imperturbability, but they are there, showing that management, like everything else, is being forced to take cognisance of new ideas in a changing world.

As for the universities, their innate scepticism, caution, conservatism, call it what we will, is not altogether surprising: indeed, at the present stage of management theory it would seem legitimate. The task of drawing ingredients from a number of related subjects and assembling them in such a way that a unified coherent subject, management, with its own inner core of discipline, emerges, has only just begun. As it is, such management courses as exist are generally grouped around a subject (often economics) or subjects with which lecturers are most familiar, and what should be the central subject of the course is a hotch-potch (or, as one writer has called it, a catalyst), having no recognizable distinctive character of its own.

It is recognized that what is needed, if management is to achieve recognition as, for example, economics did in the late 19th century and psychology in this, is that it should have a corpus of knowledge, its own theory leading to the enunciation of general laws and principles. It is this sort of task that the universities are best qualified to tackle. If the question were only one of intellectual and academic interest there would not be much more to be said. Let those in the universities who are interested and those practitioners of the art who have the time and the inclination get on with the job of evolving the theory and thereby proving their point that management is more than a mere collection of techniques and bits of knowledge drawn from neighbouring fields, something more than an innate gift which one either has or has not.

Unfortunately, we in these islands cannot afford too much time and contemplation on this question, for management is like technology in that our national well-being and livelihood in an increasingly competitive world are likely to depend on it. It was the post-war Anglo-American Productivity Reports that first drew attention to this. A (more recent) report on Automation by the Council for Industrial and Scientific Research expressed the position thus: "The need is two-fold: for management to have a broad understanding of the new principles emerging from scientific and technological developments, and for technologists and scientists

to see more clearly the economic and other managerial factors involved in implementing their advice."

This is one aspect of the matter and there are few who would quibble with it (though, one suspects, there are more who would for one reason and another, argue that it had little application to themselves). But among more narrowly commercial occupations, too, technological changes are bringing about a slow but steady transformation, involving without doubt fewer unskilled and semi-skilled office workers but more trained commercial executives. That this is happening already is indicated by the growth of management consultant companies employed to find and select executives and by the increasing sums of money spent on advertising for this purpose (estimated at over £5 millions per year in the United Kingdom). It is noteworthy that in the recent American recession this was the one category that escaped unemployment (where indeed, there were more vacancies than men). This is all part and parcel of the growth in the size and ramification of the business undertaking, the need for greater efficiency and productivity, increasing mechanization and automation in the office and the decline of the "family tradition" in business.

In both small and large companies the process by which executives are produced has been through natural selection, the gifted men rising automatically from rung to rung of the ladder under their own steam. But in many businesses it is being discovered that first-rate men in sufficient numbers and with the proper experience are not available when needed. That this should be so is not altogether surprising. One reason is that top management is too busy with day-to-day decisions of great magnitude and complexity to have time for the conscious training of subordinates. Such conscious training, call it preparation, was less necessary in days gone by, but it is necessary to-day, especially at middle or departmental level, and top management seems loath to recognize the fact. Another is the emphasis placed in recruitment, on specialized knowledge and technical qualifications, instead of on all-round training for management. As a result of scientific and technological advance there is to-day a premium on specialization and the universities have responded by turning out young men trained in this or that to the neglect of business practice and methods. Once in business life they are further discouraged from broadening their outlook by the firm itself, which keeps them within their specialist fields. It is these young men who are later on called upon to assume managerial positions for which they have neither training nor competence. Hence the current vogue for short, high-pressure executive development courses which, however stimulating, do not make up for earlier neglect.

The need for more and better trained managers (more particularly at the middle level for we must assume that the top managers will continue to be born and not made) does not, of course, prove that management is therefore a fit and proper subject for the universities to teach and that they should forthwith open up departments for this purpose. But it does mean that the whole process of contemplation and argumentation to elucidate the truth will have to be speeded up. This has

happened before (it is happening already with technology) and there is no reason why it should not happen again. If this is not done any gap in managerial efficiency that may exist between ourselves and our competitors is likely to widen in the years to come. There is a sort of cumulative process about these things. It is fashionable to mention the U.S.A. in this connection but what is happening in Europe is equally challenging.

What is needed from the universities is first, research, and second, a re-appraisal of their rôle in this new field to discover whether, after all, they may not have a distinctive contribution to make to it.

Research is fundamental and is something that each individual and each institution must undertake according to its own lights. Its general object would be to define and de-limit the subject of management, to give it shape, to show where it begins and where it leaves off, and in doing this to demonstrate to the practising manager that it is worthy of attention and study. It is noteworthy that while there are many books and innumerable articles on the various functions of a business, production, distribution, personnel, costing, etc., there is very much less on the theory of management itself, on such questions as what management is, what it is supposed to do and how it should do it, the approach to new ideas, relations with the workers, relations with the State, above all, on whether there is any coherent consistent theory at all.

Perhaps this is not altogether surprising. For one thing, management, whatever its nature, involves the organization and control not only of things and materials but also of people and as such does not lend itself to precise treatment. If it dealt only with the former it would be largely a technical exercise and amenable to measurement and scientific treatment (as F. W. Taylor argued so strongly). It is the other aspect, "getting things done through people", that causes the difficulty for this takes us into a different world and calls for quite different qualities in the manager.

There is a third aspect, business acumen, judgment and flair, that indefinable tertium quid of the successful businessman, which is probably at the back of most people's minds when they say that nothing useful can be taught.

What this implies is that management is essentially a dynamic activity, based on some principles no doubt, but individual and distinctive as regards both the particular situations confronting the manager and also as regards the way they are handled. For this activity we are obliged to use static terms which throw little light on the unique nature of each problem and decision as it comes along.

A good example of this is Fayol's classic breakdown of management into six types of activity, forecasting, planning, organizing, co-ordinating, commanding and controlling. There is nothing wrong with these terms, and indeed they are often used by managers themselves when called upon to think about and discuss the nature of their work. But one senses their inadequacy in much the same way as economic theory is inadequate in describing the behaviour of the firm. The typical businessman's reaction is

that while all this might be true in theory it does not bear much relevance to his own practical experience.

One has the same feeling when the discussion moves on to the qualities needed by a good manager: indeed one feels that these are too obvious to be worth mentioning.

While not wishing to belittle the value of such theoretical work as has been done on management and administration, I feel the time has come for a more down to earth approach in the form of job analysis to show what management is and what it actually does. Much of this research work would take the form of case-studies of the behaviour of particular business enterprises and of their management at different levels. But it would be necessary to go beyond such a collection of facts and descriptions of how things are in fact done, for this would be of little value without some criteria for distinguishing good and bad management.

What would come out of such an investigation is anybody's guess. It may be that every business situation or problem (and so management itself) is in some way unique, thereby making impossible any unified coherent theory of the subject. But this is surely going too far. I prefer to think that something useful would emerge from this two-fold approach, the field work and the calm reflection.

However, it is a tall order, especially in a humanistic study such as this where experimentation and scientific control are difficult, a field which is constantly changing and developing, a field, moreover, in which the researcher is more than usually dependent on the good-will and co-operation of his subject, the practising manager. Success will depend largely on the extent to which the new ideas have made an impact on, and percolated through, managerial levels. It may be that we shall have to wait for a new crop of managers, largely drawn from the universities, who are prepared to help because they understand what the researcher is talking about and why, and who are not over-concerned with questions of secrecy.

It is on the other question, that of the rôle of the universities in providing management training, that controversy rages. Two things are clear, first, that industry does not expect (or want) the universities to produce qualified managers, second, that it wishes, nevertheless, to recruit an ever-increasing number of university trained people. What then is it looking for? A hint was given by some remarks made by Sir Charles Renold at a joint conference on the subject: "Competence in management depends on the combination of two kinds of attributes or qualities; knowledge and intellectual competence in the acquisition and handling of knowledge and ideas, and competence in bringing this to bear on actual problems with a view to reaching decisions as to appropriate action". The universities, he felt, could provide the former, practical business experience alone could provide the latter.

The question then resolves itself into how the universities can best do their part. Is the training to be given to future business executives to continue to be the traditional formalistic preparation for the professions and the higher echelons of the civil

service, or can it be made wider and more flexible, incorporating subjects more directly related to business life? It does not seem unreasonable to suppose that "knowledge and intellectual competence" can be provided through the medium of such subjects equally as well as through that of the old-established disciplines, provided, of course, the job is well-done.

There is another point, one that has attracted rather less public attention than it deserves. This has to do with the fact that in the years to come a much higher proportion of school-leavers will be entering the universities amongst whom there will be many destined for a business career. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced plans which will enable the universities to accommodate nearly 140,000 students by 1970 compared with 84,000 in 1956. The demand for university places will almost certainly be even greater than this. In the nature of things many of these new students will not be highly academic by inclination and ability and will not be basically suited to narrowly intellectual study. Their interests will be more applied and these will in due course find expression in positions of junior and middle management. They will be the counterparts of the technologist as opposed to the "pure" scientist.

What training the universities are going to give these students is a question which is much broader than that under discussion here, but it is a question that will have to be faced. It is these middle-levels particularly (middle on the basis of school-leaving examination) that are at present not being effectively catered for. This situation is in marked contrast to that prevailing in other countries, notably the U.S.A.

I am not arguing here for a lowering of standards of university entry or in the education subsequently provided, but for a greater degree of flexibility in both. School-leavers destined for a business career should be encouraged to proceed to higher education and should be given the sort of higher education that will be of the greatest benefit both to them in their careers and also to the community. Discussing this challenge at a joint conference of industry and the universities some years ago Sir Eric Ashby made some observations which are worth quoting in full: "The universities have tacitly approved the social changes which have largely removed poverty as a barrier to higher education. They have accepted the greatly increased numbers; they are willing to be in principle the place which monopolises great talent from 18 to 21. What I am not so sure about is whether the universities are yet ready to accept the new responsibility which these changes entail. The new responsibility arises because many of these students come to the university not because they want to be scholars or professional men, indeed not because they want higher education at all, but because they are among the top 90 per cent. of the nation's intelligence and the State is financing them to come. We at the universities accept these students knowing this about them, therefore it is our duty to make some provision for their needs, bearing in mind how and why they have come. We have no right to adopt the faintly isolationist attitude which some university teachers do adopt."

It may seem strange counsel that more should be done in a field of study that has not yet fully proved itself in the eyes either of the universities or of industry. But the dilemma is more apparent than real, for, quite apart from business management itself, there is much that can be done by the universities in the background subjects on which the Urwick Report on Education for Management laid stress (the so-called inter-disciplinary approach), and in training the minds of young people. The latter, after all, is the main object of university life and study and there would seem to be as much need for it in business as in other walks of life. It seems wiser, too, for the universities, unless and until they enter more whole-heartedly into management training, to concentrate on what they know best instead of dabbling overmuch in a field in which their lecturers, generally speaking, have no special competence.

Whether or not they will acquire this competence will depend largely on closer collaboration between the universities and industry. As matters stand at present it is only the really large firms that have the benefit of organized management largely through their own, often quite elaborate, training schemes, while the smaller ones have to do with haphazard and somewhat second-best arrangements. Yet, ironically, it is often the small and medium-sized firms that have the greater need for, if not more competent, at least more versatile, managers. They cannot afford the services of functional specialists and, lacking these, their need for all-round management is all the greater. (Sometimes, one suspects, they do not want to have a new broom in the place, sweeping out old ideas and bringing in new ones.) It is here that there is often a gap between the ability of management and the demands made on it, and it is in this field that there is scope for management training in these islands.

In conclusion, I would like to stress and underline one point—any attempt to put management training on the map must be a concerted one by business and by the universities. Well-designed sandwich courses would seem to be the best prospect. Again, the quality of instruction and the confidence of business men in management training would be greatly increased by the institution of some sort of exchange system whereby, for short spells, managers would be brought into the universities and lecturers into industry, as is being recommended for the technical colleges. In fact, there is need for the same sort of partnership between the universities and industry in management as is being increasingly found in technology. Only in this way will the intellectual horizons of the universities be effectively widened and the distrust of established industry in management training dissipated.