

Management Footsteps and Foundations

Management Footsteps and Foundations:

*History, Education
Management, and
Management Education*

By

Ian Waitt

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History, Education Management, and Management Education

By Ian Waitt

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Cover and footprint designs by Susan Diamond with Nick Lewis

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It is unusual in Management Studies for a text to be extensively illustrated, even more extraordinary for there to be extensive use of colour. Management is a human activity, carried out in the human construct of society. Appreciation of significant persons contributing by thought, word or deed to the performance of management is enhanced by sight of their images, and even more so when illuminated by the colour spectrum. Presentation of many such portraits, photographs and depictions is offered to the reader to enrich the experience of learning from and reflecting upon this work, and to emphasise the essential human element in the managerial process.

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Ian Waitt, Gateshead and Montreal, 27 March 2023.

FOREWORD

The purpose of this book, the author tells us in the very first sentence of the preface, is to set the study of management within its real and true context. That is a service which is badly needed. Ever since the formal study of management began in the nineteenth century attempts have been made to de-contextualise management and treat it as something mechanical with little or no human influence. This was particularly true after the publication of the Carnegie Report in 1959 which, while it did good service in urging management studies to become more research-based, also began to drive the discipline towards a pure science paradigm to which it most definitely is not suited. The term ‘management science’ came into use, and while thankfully it is starting to fall out of fashion, the influence of a purely scientific approach to management remains strong.

But management, as Ian Waitt tells us, is fundamentally a human activity. Managers are human beings and they exist within human systems: organisations, firms, markets, all of which are social constructs. The scientisation of management had another depressing effect, too; it all but eliminated any sort of role for ethics, because as a science, management was presumably beyond the reach of ethics. When I first became involved in business studies in the early 1990s, only a few business schools taught ethics at all and even then only as an elective course, with the result that the only people who studied ethics in a business context were the people who already understood the value of and need for ethics. It was the others, the ones who dismissed ethics or saw no role for it, that we really needed to be dragging into our classrooms.

I was originally a historian, before I went over to the dark side and started teaching in business schools, and when I read articles and books that treated management as if it was a set of scientific principles, I knew instinctively that this was wrong. The diaries of Marino Sanudo, the letters of Francesco Datini, the records of business stretching back into the mists of time, showed it to be a distinctly human activity. That is why behavioural economics is so powerful a tool for explaining managerial behaviour and business performance; it admits and incorporates the human element into the heart of the business model. And also, if you accept that businesses, firms and

markets are human institutions, then as Ian Waitt points out, we must also look at their historical roots.

The past helps to explain the present, and as George Santayana pointed out, those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it. (Unfortunately, those of us who do remember the past usually get dragged down into the whirlpool with them.) So we have cycles of boom and bust, regulation and deregulation, irrational optimism and equally irrational pessimism. Today, economists laugh at Herbert Stanley Jevons who thought that economic cycles were caused by fluctuations in solar activity and solar flares. The reality is even more absurd; economic cycles are caused by us.

Culture matters, too. Ian Waitt shows us how cultural similarities and differences pervade our thinking, including our approaches to management. The scientisation of management stopped us from learning from different cultures, and that too has been a great loss. The *Tao The Ching* and the *Bhagavad Gita* have powerful lessons to teach about management and leadership, but rarely are those lessons learned. The vast majority of business case studies in common use around the world still tend to come from North American or Western European organisations, meaning the worldview of management studies is dangerously narrow. Western politicians speak blithely of competing economically with East Asia and South Asia, but that will never happen until we learn to understand and embrace other cultures.

Other books have looked at management methods in different cultures and earlier times, but rarely in as much detail as Ian Waitt provides here. There are exceptions: Moore and Lewis's *Foundations of Corporate Empire* concentrates on the ancient world, and Raoul McLaughlin's *Rome and the Distant East* focuses on links between the Roman and Chinese empires, but both do so more or less in isolation. Waitt, on the other hand, gives us continuity, showing us how management thinking and practice evolved over time, with time itself becoming an influencing factor. He shows us how the distant past and the present remain intimately connected. Over and over, he takes us out of the box of 'pure' management and shows us both the impact of social forces and trends on management, and the impact of management on wider society. Chapter 16, 'Exploring Applications to Children', ought to be required reading.

So what? Does this detailed and meticulous historical narrative matter, or is just a fascinating story? The answer is yes, it does matter, because the past

doesn't just explain the present, it also conditions and shapes it. Path dependency theory tells us that decisions made in the past influence and constrain our ability to make decisions freely in the future, just as the decision to accept the Carnegie Report shaped and – arguably – constrained the future of business schools. Waitt shows us how past thinking conditioned the present and future. The chapters on the Enlightenment and the so-called Age of Reason, for example, are particularly fascinating in this respect. The Enlightenment gave us direct influences through Adam Smith, but its influence has also been more pernicious; from the Enlightenment came the philosophical doctrine of positivism, whose direct descendant is Taylor's scientific management and, from it, the modern notion of management science.

In economics, utility theory tells us that we have unrestricted free will. We enjoy this notion, and we are sometimes reluctant to admit the power that the past exerts over us. We are the children of our ancestors; even in our greatest achievements, we stand upon the shoulders of the giants who came before us, and our failures are conditioned by the mistakes others have made.

Paradoxically, the best way to escape the influence of the past is to study it and learn from it. Ian Waitt argues for a thorough reform of management education, and I agree with him. We need a more human-centred paradigm, one where ethics and values lie at the core of every business model, where we recognise that the purpose of business is to create value, not to earn a profit. Evidence supporting this model can be found in the past; all we need to do is look for it. And of course, there is also plenty of evidence of what not to do, of pitfalls and errors that we can avoid. If we can educate a new generation of business leaders to see themselves as servants of the world around them, rather than its masters, and to learn from the lessons of what has gone before, then we will give them a chance to break out of the path-dependent trap and create a new vision of how firms and markets should work.

Can we actually do this? Ian Waitt's book shows us that a new way of thinking is possible. It is up to us now to read this book, take in its lessons, and think about how we can apply them in management education to make it fit for purpose, in the present and in the future.

Morgen Witzel
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PREFACE

The aim of this book is to set firmly the study of management within its real and true contexts. If the proper study of mankind is man within the whole human experience, the consideration of management must be equally comprehensive. It is not that those staples of Management Studies as proclaimed through academia via such vehicles as the MBA, quantitative method, and functional components, are lacking in themselves. The issue is one of tunnel vision, lacking wider context; the danger, the elevation into elite status of notions, and approaches of lessening touch with reality; and the promotion of inappropriate, dangerous, misguided theory accompanied by complacency. Evidence is, here, as obvious as it is generally overlooked, such as the excesses of the economics of neoliberalism, the increase of inequality, and the financial crises of 2007-08. Here, the Management Studies mainstream followed conventional thought and unthinking greed, failing to recognise the crash before it broke. Even the most cursory assessment of the world accommodating such approaches to the consideration of management must conclude that the gap between aspiration and reality is widening.

Long in gestation, this work reflects and replicates parts of the author's learning and both personal and professional experience, garnered through a long, varied, sometimes challenging, career in education, business and management. It crosses and interlinks three areas of study, if not disciplines, essential for the proper comprehension of management. These are: modern Management Studies, education, and history, within and across differing cultural and academic contexts.

The synthesis is rooted in personal experience. Working life has embraced 35 years in business, and 20 years' prior experience of education in: historical research, school teaching, teacher training; higher education lecturing in history, education management, and management; freelance writing; business, educational and management consultancy, with various publications at each stage; and as a company director and chairman.

Business experience includes events design and management; commodities and general commerce; trade shows and publications; with political,

economic and educational consultancy. Writing in books, learned articles and the press has extended from a text book for children to ghosting an entrepreneur's autobiography; technical education; and being the main author and editor of what the *Guardian* described as the "college bible", *College Administration*¹. The author claims to know something of which he writes.

I have taught at every stage of education, except the infant, the observation of which showed me how valuable good teachers at that level are, and the difficult and demanding nature of their jobs. At the postgraduate and post experience levels, the first factor to appreciate is that invariably, in every class, someone will know more than you do, have more insight and experience, and often be better at presentation and public speaking as well. Moreover, the breadth of the study as well as its length over time, where the nature of the subjects does not allow comprehensive cover of all the available evidence and, therefore, the selections made, may not be seen by all to meet the challenges of the attempted task. Many readers will know more than the author on many topics, have greater experience, and better ideas. Their tolerance and understanding are sought in what is proposed in the utilitarian manner to be the greater good.

That greater good is to seek to bring some new order to the worlds of management and management education. One result of the current failings is that there is no clear base from which effective reform might be made. Because of the very disparate character of management education across and within the constituent subject areas, few usually know entirely what they are talking about; and in doing, with some honourable exceptions, even less.. The component studies don't always communicate effectively or, where they do, only partially, and without understanding or appreciation of the others' competences, relevance and wisdom.

There might be, for example, competition in memoir compilation or to gain the most lucrative consultancies, the highest government advisory sinecures, or the fame of the latest guru accolade, but these are tunnel vision pursuits; in the current jargon, silo operations whereby business divisions operate independently to avoid sharing information. A stable, realistic, broad, balanced base for management education is what is required, towards the construction of which this work seeks to contribute. Through the understanding of the further subdivision of a history of management, education management, and management education, a new core for the

¹ Waitt, Ian. ed. 1980. *College Administration*. London: NATFHE, and 1987 Longman.

development of Management Studies might be found. Here, at my estimable publisher's indirect guidance, we enter the historian's refuge of choice: detection; and the detective story.

I had decided in mid-2017 that the time had come to renew my efforts in the world of writing, to retreat from business other than to maintain a presence with one company and be available for occasional projects with two others. The bulk of my time would be spent in writing about the topic upon which I had lectured for approaching a decade in higher education, some 30 years ago: management, seen through the perspectives of education management and management education, within the context of a history of management. I was confronted by seemingly exclusive, opposing realities. Management Studies appeared to have become an academic closed shop; an economics and finance emphasis had become dominant, and management disconnected from the entities it was supposedly managing. Whatever was new was upheld and applauded. The voices of experience went unheeded if not unheard.

It was, therefore, with great appreciation that I had come across the verdict of the distinguished Canadian commentator Morgen Witzel (1960-) of Exeter University, who had opined sadly in his definitive study of the history of management thought:

...management thinking is increasingly becoming a closed world, and I do not think it is too strong to say that it exists for selfish ends. I have already remarked that it is rare for non-academics to be invited to write for management publications save for a few exceptions such as the *Harvard Business Review*. Unless non-academics choose to write their own books – and can find a publisher – management thinking is now the province of academe.²

As that province was the body which had assisted the financial disaster of 2007-2009, comfortable with the amorality of the economism supportive of rising inequality, and now seeks to close the door on its secret garden, it cannot be held that Management Studies is in safe hands.

Witzel has observed the “slow but steady disengagement” of academia from “real world” publishing. He reported having heard academics refusing publication in popular journals lest their reputations might be damaged; of universities discouraging young academics from writing books or even

² Witzel, Morgen. *A History of Management Thought*, pp. 237-8.

chapters in books, or anything other than for peer-reviewed journals (which are read only by very few). The game is tawdry. It shows research is being done and makes reputations, enabling the employing institution to bolster its ranking record, so to enable its acquisition of more funding agency income. The result is to deny access to practising managers, employers, potential students and the tax paying public, cheating fee-paying pupils as well.

Such suppression of access, denial of contribution, and creation of a self-serving, closed elite, hoarding its oligarchic fruits and privilege is a woefully under-reported scandal. That outrage is magnified as management and business studies have become the most popular university courses, at ever-escalating cost, to students beginning their adult life burdened by considerable, consequential, possibly life-long debt. Morgen Witzel went so far as to write of the struggle to reform Management Studies as being a battle between good and evil. He defined management thinkers' tasks as being to work out what management is for, what its principles are, and teaching those to new generations of leaders and managers so that they may tackle future problems confidently and skilfully. To this *quondam* academic making a living in business and as a manager, such brave denunciation with its constructive remedy formed a decisive inspiration to expand this work into the form adumbrated in these introductory pages.

Meanwhile, the weight of evidence of inequality, climate change and pandemic made major reappraisals and world altering changes imperative. Without them, it is difficult to comprehend their challenges and associated pressures on people and resources being successfully managed. The infrastructure of management plainly requires urgent strengthening.

There is a human tendency, a bias in the language of the behavioural economists, to take what we might term a *sapiocentric* view of the world. Everything revolves around humans, as if they were the sun, an inversion of the helio-centralism which marked the turning point of the Renaissance. We don't know the causes of the viral transmutation of Covid-19, or the earlier eruption of *Yersinia pestis*, bringer of plague. Maybe such mutations are prompted by climate change; maybe not. We can't foresee the unforeseeable; but we can expect it. History is full of it. People may cause it, suffer from it, or both.

It is people who have made the varieties of civilisation which are now confronted by the greatest management tasks and issues ever known to

humanity. How did we get here? Where do we go from here? How do we manage it? Our detective tale includes all that can be construed as Management Foundations. These may be as obvious as those itemized in **Case Study 3**, of such major indirect consequence as the siege of Kaffa, or as obscure to western culture as Taoist method. Exposed through literary archaeology perhaps, overt reference to the foundations is sparse. The evidence being all around us, the title *Management Footsteps and Foundations* on the front cover of this book may safely be left to speak for itself. With so much historic evidence and contingency advice arising in abundant supply, it might have been thought that management of the latest misfortune to befall humanity might have been better tackled from inception.

In the case of the pandemic, the damage done to the economies of the US and UK was attributable to their acting too late. Each saw themselves as so well prepared that neither need concern themselves - so they did not, even initially selling protective equipment elsewhere.³ The resurgence of competence shown in their successful vaccine programmes highlights the initial failure. The medical science management paradox is that the better you are at solving problems, the less likely it is that your serious warnings will be heeded. Capitalism (and Apollo, to anticipate the following classical theme) shows that prevention doesn't pay; but disease does.

Hindsight is a valuable attribute of history. The historical mind is accustomed to expect and accept it, which is why it is an essential presence in Management Studies. The concept of the *pre-mortem* is another valuable insight of behavioural economics: whenever a new policy is presented to a company board or government ministry, consider where fault and blame would be laid should the initiative fail. The historical approach can be its own validation. The *Footsteps* in the title mark a journey through history, a stroll through the civilised side with occasional monstrous gallery shows, a trek from myth through many managerial milestones and foundations.

The antecedents of the dominant Anglo-American modern management model result from historical inheritance: from Roman models, the Enlightenment inspired creation of the revolutionary United States of America, and the nature and consequences of the Industrial Revolutions. While Hegel lamented that a lesson of history was that we did not learn from history, it is those very historical foundations which are vital to managing

³ Lewis, Michael. *The Premonition: A Pandemic Story*, Introduction.

the present and informing future management. The crucial importance of bringing main facets of the history of human management to attention now can be illustrated with one simple but devastating circumstance.

As water power was overtaken by steam power, CO₂ emissions began to rise. In 1776, the first year that James Watt (1736-1819) marketed his steam engine, people caused the emission of some 15 million tons of CO₂. By 1800, the figure had doubled. In 1850, it reached 200 million tons a year. At century's end, the amount was almost two billion. Now, the figure is close to 40 billion tons, with the atmosphere so altered by humanity through its industrial and agricultural processes that one out of every three CO₂ molecules in the air was the result of human action.⁴ Never can the change management rule of the occurrence of unintended consequences have been better illustrated.

I have been fortunate in having experience of working in South Korea, China, India and much of South East Asia, as well as parts of Africa and the Arab world. Oriental management inheritance has influenced heavily the growth of modern East Asian managerial technique. Cross fertilisation through the Islamic world, competing religious influences, warfare and resultant advances in technology have all spurred the development process. Perhaps the least known and noticed is the fusion of Taoist thought and rational economics as set forward by Adam Smith. A further number of countries, east and west, may make justifiable claims to current and future primacy but the Anglo-American phenomenon, for all its inevitable flaws, remains core to an understanding of how we got to where we are, and how we might go forward.

It is my experience and consideration that those processes require an understanding of the history of management, its primary forms and purposes. Approaches differ according to times and context. To the individual manager, an understanding of company, institution, public service or charity history can be vital to an organisation's health. The standard management forms of autocracy, oligarchy, bureaucratic hierarchy and representative democracy all have long antecedents. Divinity, and therefore legitimacy, by ancestry, association, acclaim, appointment and anointment were attached to autocracy.

Cooperative, mutual and representational forms emerged over time. From

⁴ Kolbert, Elizabeth. *Under a White Sky*, pp. 147-8.

state management to that of private and public enterprise, with many hybrid functions, organisational forms, from family, to partnerships and associations, have been created and deployed to serve perceived needs. Within those, common themes arise: the preference of reliability to talent; the accommodation of entrepreneurialism; the means and nature of controls; the degrees to which leadership and management can be taught (if at all), mentored, or learned through experience.

People in the construction business have long learned that it is unwise to build on sand or swamp, or raise the roof beams before the support joists can bear the load. The problem with the management business is that foundations may be variable according to conditions. What, managers may ask, may be safely relied on? What is to be avoided? Valid though such questions are, they may apply only to long held assumptions, outdated method, or be dependent on circumstances. Search for foundations may be as variable as reliance thereon. It is as reasonable to ask if the manager knows what she or he is doing, as it is to inquire after the methods or means of assessment. For guidance, there is always the perspective of history, provided careful appraisal is applied.

For the present and future, the wealth of the formative information of the past forms a central column of validated experience which stands as a permanent recourse - not for prediction, but as an assistance to thought, guidance towards wisdom. Such has been humanity's progress that it has now reached the god-like status of being able to create and artificially adapt life, and so its responsibility for sustainability has heightened. In that process, what we do has been superseded as a responsibility by how we do it.

Management, at all levels and in all contexts, has become glaringly apparent in requiring ethical conduct. Human behaviour varies according to times, context and opportunity; human nature appears to have been predictable, if not knowable, since inception. Given that, if management is about doing things right, and leadership doing the right thing, then management education is concerned with developing the understanding of those principles within a known, if infinitely variable, context – until the next unforeseeable interruption.

Law and regulation are always out of step with developing need, requiring an understanding of emergent issues before making interventions. Such has been the rate of technological change in the current century, and so great the