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The Challenge of Management Professionalization

This chapter traces the historical background behind the long effort to professionalize British management in the twentieth century. As the title suggests, this process has been contested throughout this period when even the concept of 'management' itself as a defined body of knowledge was challenged; these questions over the existence and contents of a distinct 'management' field of study made claims for professionalization that much harder, especially when compared to long-standing professions such as the law or medicine. This chapter therefore attempts to reinvigorate these debates by looking back at changing ideas of professionalization as well as specific instances where groups or individuals have advocated for the professionalization of management workers.

Drawing upon published books and articles, research theses, newspapers, and trade publications, the chapter continues as follows. The first section discusses the professionalization effort by British management and highlights a number of prominent concepts in this long debate. In the second section concentrates on the sociology of professionalization and how this has interacted with the efforts of managers in the United Kingdom (UK) to secure greater professional recognition during the twentieth century. The third section pursues a particular line of thinking expounded by one of the leading British management consultants and professionalization advocates of the second half of the century, Edward Brech. The chapter concludes with some final thoughts on how some elements of business history might fit into management teaching taking place in business schools to assist the professionalization effort.

The Professionalization Debate and British Management

A variety of authors, predictably, have weighed in on the management professionalization debate over the years. Some management writers dismiss it out of hand: Henry Mintzberg joyfully steps past the issue in the first chapter of his book *Managers not MBAs*, claiming that because in his view management cannot be 'taught in advance of practice, out of context' (Mintzberg, 2004: 11) in the same way that medicine or engineering might be, it cannot, by definition, be a profession.

Indeed business history offers many examples of 'managers' without a day of formal training who experience considerable success, while many of the most highly trained people suffer business or career reverses because of their inability to match their training with the complexities of actual practice. While hardly alone in his critiques of various programmes, Mintzberg has been particularly vocal about the failings of management training programmes for a long time, and his refusal to consider management as a profession akin to others such as medicine, law, or education comes as no surprise to long-term readers in the field.[1]

If we move beyond those who refuse to engage in the debate in the first place – and overlooking this argument does not deny Mintzberg's substantial contributions to thinking about management, management education, and 'the work managers do' – there remains a significant literature about the professionalization process and management's efforts to raise its public status to the level of other established professional groups. At the turn of the twentieth century, Sidney and Beatrice Webb discussed the relationship between trade unionism and democratic society in their book *Industrial Democracy*. They argued that trade unions would increasingly be nationalised in the public interest, and those who worked on behalf of the 'citizen-consumer' would begin to 'assume the character of professional associations' (Webb and Webb, 1920: 825-6). Coincidentally, Keeble (Keeble, 1992) reports that the first attempts at what we now consider management education began during this period in London, Birmingham, and elsewhere suggesting the Webbs may have been even more prescient than previously believed.

Edward T. Elbourne leapt onto the management scene with the 1914 publication of his book *Factory Administration and Accounts*. The book outlined his ideas to codify 'management' and make its principles comprehensible to businessmen, accountants, and engineers alike. A career factory-level manager without upper management experience, he still felt strongly that management could be studied and learned like many other disciplines. Elbourne, in short, wished to professionalize industrial managers. The outbreak of the war in late summer of that year led him to become an assistant general manager at the Ponders End National Shell Factory in 1915 and Elbourne held that post until 1919. During the war Elbourne's book sold over ten thousand

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[1] He illustrates this with an amusing comparison: schoolchildren must often contend with 'substitute' teachers, but would businesspeople ever consider employing a 'substitute manager' for a day a week in a business while they were ill or travelling for business? Mintzberg's point is the importance of *context* to managerial capabilities and performance. See page 12 of MINTZBERG, H. 2004. *Managers Not MBAs : A Hard Look at the Soft Practice of Managing and Management Development,* Harlow, England, Pearson Education Ltd.

copies across Britain and its success encouraged him further in his quest. In 1919 he formed an engineering consulting business with his former boss Harry Brindley but more importantly they decided to pursue the formation of a central management institute. Activities of others made the timing seem right: in 1919 the Manchester School of Technology began its first courses in management subjects, and businessman Seebohm Rowntree used his influence to begin a series of annual conferences on management topics, later held at Oxford. But Elbourne and Brindley alone called for a central institute catering specifically to the needs and interests of managers. They moved quickly in order to make use of the mood surrounding management: by August of that year they had sent out 5000 copies of a provisional prospectus for a management body that would become the Institute of Industrial Administration (IIA) in 1920.[2]

The study of industrial management did not abate during the interwar years. Oliver Sheldon's 1923 volume *The Philosophy of Management* began to talk about general management as a profession emerging out of earlier work done by people such as Frederick W. Taylor and others (Sheldon, 1923). The establishment of the Institute for Industrial Administration and similar activities began a new phase of the parallel development of management as a discipline and its attempts to professionalize. Management consultancies began to appear in the UK run by Charles Bedaux, Lyndall Urwick, and others (Kreis, 1992, Fitzgerald, 1995, Larson, 2003. For Bedaux, see chapter 3 of Weatherburn, 2014. For more on Urwick, see Brech et al., 2010). In parallel, research on the sociology of professions progressed also: an article by Talcott Parsons (Parsons, 1939) examined their function(s) within modern society and questioned whether individual motivational differences account for the perceived differences between 'professionals' (traditionally seen as prioritizing altruism) and normal 'business men' (seen as prioritizing self-interest). His interwar juxtaposition of 'professionals' with 'business men' reflected the difficulty managers and directors had faced, and therefore might continue to face, in any serious professionalizing mission. Alongside his other works, Parsons's functionalist construct became part of the sociological lexicon at least until the 1970s.[3] In spite of the efforts of the IIA and

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[2] For a thorough history of the development of the Institute, see ROSE, T. G. & INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL ADMINISTRATION 1954. *A history of the Institute of Industrial Administration, 1919-1951,* London, Institute of Industrial Administration. Edward Brech also explored the IIA's growth and its later merger with the British Institute of Management; see chapters 2-5 of BRECH, E. F. L. & DEMPSTER, A. 1999. *A History of Management,* Corby, Northants, Institute of Management.

[3] This is not surprising given Parsons's long career and productivity. In her review of Freidson's book (see below), Geraldine Tate Clausen wrote that 'There is a work-orientation stemming from the practitioner's role…which makes him far less likely than the scholar or researcher to manifest the Parsonian professional values…'. This suggests that

subsequent writers, during the interwar period in Britain it remained impossible to speak of a professional class of manager in the way Elbourne envisioned.

The post-war re-examination of Britain's industrial management capabilities began a chain of events which seemed to promise great things for managers in business enterprises. The Second World War had shown the usefulness of skilled technical people in improving industrial productivity, and the rise of 'technocrats' within governments and other organizations began. Once the war ended British industrialists immediately made efforts to retain and expand such expertise with the creation of the Administrative Staff College at Henley-on-Thames in 1946 (Larson, 2003), the establishment of which had been under discussion since 1943; the Staff College – a direct parallel for businessmen and Civil Service personnel to the military colleges at Sandhurst and elsewhere – aimed to enhance managers' job skills and offered the chance for students to communicate with their peers about common problems. Another college opened a few years later with the establishment in 1959 of the Ashridge College in Berkhamstead. Located away from major conurbations and the distractions of students' everyday business concerns, these colleges created small groups or 'syndicates' of men from the world of business with similar levels of experience and training, and enabled them to confer with each other to share solutions, reflect on problems, and gain exposure to concerns outside of their own organizations or industries. As 'proto-professionals' these men (students at these colleges were all men in those days) shared a great deal in common and could have, had they chosen or been guided by tutors to do so, adopted a perspective which encouraged them to advocate and pursue a more thoroughgoing agenda of professionalization.

Such small operations, however, did not possess sufficient scale to make sweeping changes by themselves in the landscape of British management. They were both highly selective in terms of their students while also intellectually narrow – there was no attempt to conduct research or do much more than facilitate discussion and reflection among the syndicate members. The cost of the programme erected a barrier to more widespread participation; furthermore, nearly all students were nominated by their companies and interviewing by Henley staff played a large role in admissions. But the creation of these small cohorts of like-minded men of similar age, work

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she assumed most readers of the *American Sociological Review* would know what these 'Parsonian' (functionalist) values were. CLAUSEN, G. T. 1971. Review of Eliot Freidson's 'Profession of Medicine: A Study of the Sociology of Applied Knowledge'. *American Sociological Review,* 36**,** 1166-7.

experience, and career trajectory may have been a tiny example of an effort to create a sense of professional co-responsibility for the success of at least large-scale firms of the day (see chapter 4 of Larson, 2003). Various companies made their own internal efforts at management preparation through things like job rotation and other development techniques, but these remained embryonic, localised, and therefore small in scale. These early attempts, however, arguably paved the way for the advent of the first university business schools in the middle of the 1960s and their subsequent spread across the university sector in the United Kingdom. Over time the increased size and number of management courses meant that the exclusivity of student admission and the opportunity to form strong and durable bonds with others on one's course, so prominent in the Henley and Ashridge colleges, decreased. One possible element of the justification for the establishment of formal degree-granting management education programmes within universities in the UK arose from the search for professional status to combat the widely-held view in British society that management, especially manufacturing management, did not represent a socially-desirable career as was the case for the military, (higher) civil service, or the financial industry. This may have resulted from the fact that two of the roles, the military and finance, are concerned with *directing* resources in the same way as social elites had done for centuries rather than actually *employing* these resources themselves, which may have served to make these activities more desirable or acceptable.

Yet Britain wanted (and some believed, needed) more business experts, managers whose companies would produce goods for domestic but especially foreign consumption, and managers who could keep the peace between themselves and organized labour. The emphasis here fell upon productivity, wage restraint, and various financial measures, usually of a short-term nature; there was no time or motivation for managers across the wide range of industrial sectors (some of which found themselves nationalized by the Attlee Labour Government shortly after the war ended) to compose and instil a professional sense of responsibility for growing the national wealth. Two things occurred in 1960 that would dramatically alter the path of the management professionalization debate in the UK: the first was the wide dissemination of the Ford Foundation (Gordon and Howell, 1959) and Carnegie Foundation (Pierson, 1959) reports on management education, which began to change the way management education was conceived and taught in the US and elsewhere. The second was the beginning of attempts to formalize management education in the UK which resulted in the London and Manchester business schools in the middle of the

1960s (Wilson and Manchester Business School, 1992, Larson, 2003). The professionalization debate continued into the 1960s and researchers grew more sophisticated in their approach to the subject.

Quickening the Pace

Harold Wilensky's provocatively titled "The Professionalization of Everyone?" (Wilensky, 1964) posited a number of substantial points and reflected the changing nature of post-war society when it appeared in 1964. Wilensky's paper heralded a beginning of the end to earlier definitional debates about professionalization and signalled a shift into a more complex sociological examination of the activities of interest groups in society. He talks of a 'technical service ideal' (Wilensky, 1964: 141) and how this is based upon two key pillars: specialist technical knowledge and agreed professional norms. He studied eighteen professional groups to determine if there was a common process of professionalization and derived a five-step process which he claimed applied to most, if not all, professions. From Wilensky's list of five stages, some of them, such as the fourth – that of seeking legal protection for certified practitioners in the field – do not easily apply in business management. He even pointed out that 'many occupations will be tempted to try everything at once [all the stages concurrently] or anything opportunity or expediency dictate. The "professionalization" of labor, management, and commerce is largely of this kind' (Wilensky, 1964: 146). Although he was writing about the situation in the United States, this last observation is particularly telling. Wilensky's research did not specifically address the professionalization process for management as such but after analysing the trajectories of a number of professional groups, he argued that management along with several other activist groups had not yet navigated the professionalization process successfully.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Britain's national economic situation began to shift in numerous ways which continued to undermine any effort to create a conventionally 'professional' managerial class on a national scale. While in previous generations the highest management ranks of business tended to be significantly if not exclusively populated by those from the higher social classes in the country (Quail, 1998), the post-war 'baby boom' generation would help to democratize management enormously with respect to social class background in the 1970s as those children reached maturity and began to enter organizations of all sizes. In the 1940s and 1950s, the hand-picked students at the Henley or Ashridge colleges might have expected to have broadly

similar educational backgrounds to their classmates due to family or class advantages, but by the 1970s and 1980s for most cohorts of business students this was no longer the case. Britain had embarked upon a long and slow path toward a more meritocratic system, but privileged social elites continued to rise highest in British companies. Company directorships especially attracted those with titles and considerable social capital, and these directors unsurprisingly appointed senior managers who reflected similar perspectives and opinions to those they held themselves (see for example Whitley et al., 1981).

As the demographics and economic conditions evolved so did the nation's understanding of the relationships between management, labour and government. The steady erosion of the so-called 'post-war consensus' about the desirability of full employment and rising standards of living as a reward for the sacrifices during wartime meant that labour strife rose and the difficulties of management grew, especially within mature industries like textiles, coal, and automobiles. The rise of the welfare state encouraged a growth in bureaucracy with its concomitant hierarchical organization, antithetical to the forms of work valued – if not always enjoyed – by professionals (Perkin, 1989). Very slowly, companies demonstrated more interest in managers with educational credentials purporting to show that they prepared for the challenges they would face in their careers; if nothing else, qualifications suggested an agreement with the basic ethos of management. In the tense industrial relations atmosphere, perhaps people felt that educational qualifications helped to justify managers' places at the bargaining table or enabled them to assemble sophisticated financial information to bolster arguments with either the government or labour unions. However public perception of the poor performance of many British industries did little to boost the social esteem managers and directors held in British society. The search for social status consonant with similar professional groups continued.

A growing interest in hiring business graduates arose alongside an expansion in management education opportunities in British universities. The increase in the number of universities in the 1960s gradually allowed more students to attend courses, thus feeding nascent business and management education programmes which themselves took some inspiration from the London and Manchester business schools started during the middle of this decade. Early business school degree recipients in the UK knew about the higher pay and status enjoyed by graduates of American Master of Business Administration (MBA) programmes and sought that sort of recognition from the firms that hired them; for their part, firms had yet to be convinced that

these allegedly well-trained and 'slick' graduates deserved premium pay and other benefits. Press criticism of MBAs reflected business community sentiments, ranging from wariness to outright disapproval, regarding the MBA graduate. The more disturbing ones for MBAs had headlines such as "MBA: Mediocre But Arrogant" or "Means Bugger All" (i.e. worthless) (Robertson, 1970, Roeber, 1971, Wills, 1971, Mosson, 1972, Lester, 1991, Shipman, 2002, Stern, 2002). The disconnection between the elevated expectations of recent graduates and the more critical attitudes of employers generated a lasting tension which, ironically, further undermined professional status recognition efforts by managers by constructing barriers for mutual professional cooperation even within the same companies. While those tensions have faded away over the past three decades, new critics have surfaced who question the value of management education to business in terms of its intellectual content and its usefulness to business: the works of Henry Mintzberg in particular criticize the content of management training and education (Mintzberg, 1973, Mintzberg, 1989, Mintzberg, 2004). There is a long literature that holds business schools responsible for failing to inculcate successfully not just the technical skills needed for business but also the code of conduct or ethical element that has recently risen [returned?] to the forefront of public consciousness. Books such as Robert Locke's *Confronting Managerialism: How the Business Elite and Their Schools Threw Our Lives Out of Balance* (Locke and Spender, 2011) and other recent publications by Starkey and Tiratsoo (Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007), Khurana (Khurana, 2007) and Morsing & Rovira (Morsing et al., 2011) highlight these critiques, coming from both within and outside of business schools. Such criticisms have not helped the professionalization cause.

Simultaneously the sociology of professionalization rapidly produced some further, and more seminal, contributions to the field. Eliot Freidson's *Profession of Medicine: A Study of the Sociology of Applied Knowledge* (Freidson, 1970) was soon followed by Magali Sarfatti Larson's *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Sarfatti Larson, 1977).[4] Together these books helped to update and reshape views of existing accepted professions (medicine, teaching, law, etc.) by studying the professionalization process itself combined with the ideology(s) that defined it, a theme discussed previously decades earlier by such authors as Sheldon and Parsons mentioned above. As a reconceptualization of the professions advanced alongside macro-level social changes in the wake of the Second World War, these later books by Freidson and Larson took a more sophisticated sociological view of the world of professions and what it might mean to

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[4] There is no relation between Sarfatti Larson and the author of this chapter.

be a 'professional' or to undertake a 'professional project', that is, the effort to acquire high status for individual professionals regardless of their organizational affiliation. Sarfatti Larson's Marxist-inspired interpretation in particular received praise for being well grounded historically (Wood, 1977, Mills, 1978, Barber, 1979, Riggs, 1982). In contrast, Schudson voiced more criticism (1980).

Around the same time Terence Johnson published *Professions and Power* in Britain in 1972 (Johnson, 1972). In it, Johnson explicitly asked whether the professions played specific roles (economic, political, or social) in modern society. Johnson points out historically- and culturally-bound elements of earlier models like those affecting Parsons's distinction between professionals and businessmen. Others had previously questioned the level of 'altruistic' behaviour allegedly shown by people in established professions, specifically medicine (Wilensky, 1964: 148). His main contribution however suggested flaws in the conventional sociology of the professions and these flaws arose from one of two sources, depending on the approach used. Either the flaws came from the limitations of the functionalist focus (e.g. Talcott Parsons) on professions acting within a society, or arose from the 'traits' of individual professions, including those arising from the 'professionalization' process itself (e.g. Wilensky, Freidson, and others). In their place Johnson offered another explanation which attempted to overcome these concerns by accounting for variations within the institutional framework of professional practice(s), in part by addressing the relationship with clients coming from a wide range of social backgrounds. For Johnson, the differences can be explained, at least in part, by looking closely at the forms of institutional control and how these are exercised within, and in part outside of, the professional group itself.

Another decade passed before Andrew Abbott's *The System of the Professions* produced considerable reaction when it was published in 1988 (Abbott, 1988). Another major publication on the topic of professionalization, it took an ecological view of the many (more than fifty) professions he identified. Instead of outlining the alleged 'professional' characteristics that appeared to stretch across numerous occupational categories as others had done using the 'trait' approach, he took a view that professions competed against each other for specific spaces in the public arena; that is, they often fought for 'territory' both tangible and intangible that the individual profession could call its own. This territory, once won, could be defended against intruders by the construction of barriers to entry, such as legal rights to practice negotiated with the state, possession and demonstration of a closely guarded body of knowledge (usually but not exclusively

acquired in a university setting), and demands to adhere to a set of behavioural norms set within the profession. This hard-won territory could also be lost, however, to a more powerful competing professional group or it could be given up willingly as the profession itself found 'greener pastures' ripe for colonization. Abbott's view reads in many ways as a more advanced 'functionalist' approach to the professions, but only in the sense that the 'function' the professions are performing is not limited merely to the services performed on behalf of clients for the greater good of society, but also on behalf of the profession overall in competition with other professions for the most valuable or prestigious 'territory' available in the relevant sphere of activity.

Abbott's book generated a good deal of further discussion and examination of the issues he raised. The 'ecosystem' view outlining the evolution of *interlocking communities of professions* represented an original approach to understanding the phenomenon that he set out to examine. Closer inspection by later authors revealed some of the problems of this view for mainstream business managers and directors. For example, Christopher Grey pointed out that under the Abbott model a 'profession' needed to possess a specific technical body of knowledge which was sufficiently abstracted from individual circumstances to empower its practitioners to apply this knowledge across a broad range of cases or situations (Grey, 1997). Abbott, with the (unrelated) support of authors like Richard Whitley (see Grey, 1997, Whitley, 1984), denied that managers could prove that management studies constituted an academic discipline in the same manner as other fields like law, engineering, or education. The paradox for Grey is that despite this apparently fatal flaw, the occupational 'territory' in which management beliefs and practices are dominant or in the ascendancy continued to expand. According to Abbott, that should be something only a profession is able to accomplish, and yet management – which Mintzberg, Abbott, and Whitley all independently posit is most definitely *not* a profession – keeps expanding the territory in which its values and dominant perspectives prevail.

Grey explains the process by claiming that in the case of management the professionalization mission has primarily been one of seeking status rather than defining a technical body of knowledge. He admits that efforts have been made in this latter area in the past by the early management gurus of their day, including Henri Fayol, Frederick W. Taylor, Lyndall Urwick, and Edward Brech (Grey, 1997: 708). But instead of focusing on the success or failure of these efforts, he concentrates on the intentional (re-)positioning of management studies in the scientific realm and notes repeated emphasis on the *science* aspects of the term *social science*.

Management studies, he says, have been labelled and conceived in very positivistic ways specifically to transfer the legitimacy of more established scientific disciplines onto management. This process of transferring status shows signs of success, though the effort is mitigated by three main factors. First, management as a group is internally fragmented because of the nature of the work itself and the tensions that exist between various levels of managers, even within the same company. Likewise, state support for a professionalising mission, which Timmons (Timmons, 2010: 339) highlighted as an important element in the process, has been absent. Second, managers are organizationally dependent for their work in a way that individual practitioners of other professions, such as law, are not (the teaching profession might run aground on this same issue). This means their autonomy as professionals is constrained by factors outside of their control; the vast majority of managers are, after all, employees. Finally, most managers – especially those embedded in the middle levels of larger organisations – are subject to increased monitoring activity as their work becomes ever more bureaucratic and less open to contextual application of systematic knowledge, which was previously identified as a conventional hallmark of professional activity. Grey then shows that the first two of these arguments against professionalization of managers can be solidly questioned, and then addresses the third – the routinization of management work – in greater depth.

This third element deals with what Grey calls the 'responsibilization' of managers, that is, the process of socialising them into a collection of values and behaviours sufficiently in agreement with the employer's preferences to render them 'trustworthy and predictable by virtue of their beliefs and behaviours' to become stewards of the company's resources (Grey, 1997: 719). If this is true, Grey has brought us full circle and seems to endorse the views of people like Mintzberg and Whitley mentioned earlier: it is not the *content* of management education which gives it a 'professional' aura but instead the *values transmitted through it* to students of the subject. Grey, like others before and since, recognised that the socialization process that management students undergo represented a large if usually misunderstood portion of students' educational experiences. Instead of business-friendly values being infused into the student as a sort of by-product of studying the 'science' of management, infusing those values is instead posited as the main purpose of business education where the teaching of particular theories and techniques relevant to business operations serves merely as an excuse for the opportunity to imbue values in the next generation of 'responsibilized' managers. As shown above, the titles of recent books studying the situation

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in both America and Europe have picked up on the two main aspects of this issue, both the lack of effective management content within management schools as well as their function as transmitters of social values useful to, or at least not incompatible with, the core values of corporations and their leaders.

'Responsibilization' and the views of Edward Brech

In June 2005, a Management History Research Group workshop was held at Queen Mary, University of London, to discuss participants' research ideas and projects related to management history. I was asked by the organiser to serve as chairperson for the first session of the day, and thus had the honour of introducing the management consultant turned business historian Edward Brech as a panellist in this session. As is common at such events, I introduced him briefly, explained that each presenter would have about twenty minutes to present, and said that we would take questions immediately after each person had spoken. Brech stood up, graciously thanked 'our chairman' for the introduction, and proceeded to explain why he felt that Britain needed not only professional management qualifications but also that he wanted to see a thorough-going professionalization of management, encompassing all managers and directors in the United Kingdom. Brech was well aware of much of the professionalization literature discussed above, of course, having contributed to it himself over many years. Brech spoke for only about ten or twelve minutes, finished his presentation and sat down. After a moment of confusion at this unexpectedly swift conclusion, I announced that we were ready to take questions. Though my memory of the event has faded somewhat, I remember everyone in the room quickly raising a hand to dispute Brech's stated position on the wisdom, necessity, or viability of the professionalization agenda he had just briefly outlined for businesspeople in the British economy.

It is possible that the nonagenarian Edward Brech, a seasoned veteran of British industrial management who had worked alongside some of the biggest names in British management consultancy and who had played a notable role in the evolution of post-war management training, was simply testing the younger generation by deliberately provoking them with his professionalization arguments. Most of the participants in the room knew the basic story of British management education, and this does not bear reviewing here; other sources provide rich and insightful histories of these events (Wilson and Manchester Business School, 1992, Keeble, 1992,

Larson, 2003, Workman, 2004, Wilson and Thomson, 2006, Williams, 2010). But in general Brech's comments were only partly historical and it appears that he may have been looking to the future for the realisation of a goal which had heretofore proved elusive throughout the twentieth century: the creation and implementation of a true professionalization *process* for British managers.

Brech himself had more than weighed in on the topic of the history of management in the UK with the completion of his enormous five-volume work entitled *The Evolution of Modern Management in Britain 1832-1979* which naturally included discussion of educational programmes for current or aspiring managers (Brech, 2002). Arising from his PhD (Brech, then 85 years old, was among the first Britons to complete a doctorate explicitly in the field of 'business history'), the work represents an enormous investment of time and energy in trying to bring a definitive voice to the history of management in the UK. His passion for the topic was obvious – but as the hands shot up from people in the audience, it became obvious that the rationale for professionalizing British management in the twenty-first century did not appear as clear to everyone else as it might have been for Brech. His presentation outlined a particular type of professionalization for British managers which could, arguably, have brought them centre-stage in British national life. How did he believe this could be accomplished?

Brech's short paper says volumes in its two typed pages.[5] While he acknowledges that politicians and policy makers eagerly took credit for what in 2005 appeared to be several years of reasonably strong economic performance from the middle 1990s onwards, his paper focused primarily upon those he believed genuinely created wealth in the British economy: industrial and commercial managers and directors. Brech noted that these same self-congratulating politicians were content to leave blame for the general (long-term) decline of Britain's economic power "where it belonged professionally", that is, with those same directors and managers of businesses. His paper painted a sobering picture of the economy in the early years of the new millennium, highlighting the loss of Britain's former industrial and commercial power, pointing out that then-current [2005] unemployment figures continued to show nearly 1.5 million people out of work which Brech noted as "a figure higher than in the depression years of 1971-72", and lamenting the

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[5] E.F.L. Brech, 'Historical Lessons for the Advancement of Management in Britain's Twenty-First Century'. Paper circulated to delegates to the 2005 Management History Research Group meeting held at Queen Mary, University of London, on 13-14 June. All quotations presented here within double quotation marks come from this short paper unless otherwise stated.

near-constant refrain in public discourse of the inability to "afford the initiation of a desirable new service, or the construction of even much-needed new premises…and not infrequently important improvements in existing public services." The Great Britain to which Brech referred was not so 'great' after all, and given the actual economic reality described above he suggested that it was time, in effect, for Britain's managerial class to 'grow up.'

He argued that the three main hallmarks of professionalization could easily be applied to business. The first, that there was "a pertinent body of specialist knowledge and know-how that can be taught and learned", has itself been a topic of strenuous discussion both in Britain and abroad (see above discussion as well as others such as (Grey, 1997, Reed and Anthony, 1992, Wilson and Thomson, 2006). Brech himself had participated in these debates alongside such vocal supporters as management consultant Lyndall Urwick (Brech et al., 2010); both, not surprisingly, came down on the affirmative side of the discussion. The advent of formal management education within universities at graduate degree level in the 1960s had generated considerable doubt among both academics and the business community regarding whether 'management' was an academic subject worthy of inclusion within the pre-expansion university system that existed in the UK in that period (Larson, 2003: 115). In the end, however, through a combination of building upon earlier expertise in London and Manchester and some small help from American management educators, the beginnings of British postgraduate business schools took shape and with it the construction within the university sector of an identifiable body of knowledge relevant to management specialists. Thus the first hallmark of professionalization could claim to have been addressed, even if it did not fully convince everyone.

Brech's second and third hallmarks of professionalization are two sides of the same coin. The second hallmark claims that a profession "has an objective in service to other persons and/or to the community." It was this point that served as the crux of Brech's argument that day in 2005: he was arguing that a true 'profession' serves the community first and itself and its members second. The third hallmark, he wrote, demanded that the members of a profession "value and pursue that objective [service to others] in manifest preference to their own personal gain, benefit, or advantage." That is to say, professionals demonstrate, through their own actions, that the needs of the community and (or) their clients are prioritized ahead of their own desires. For some established professions these patterns have been demonstrated and accepted by the society surrounding them for a long time. The usual examples are law, where there is steady professional

pressure for lawyers to abide by an agreed code of professional conduct regarding such things as client confidences, and medicine, where the efforts of medical professionals attending the patient are wholly intended for the patient's benefit (this has been questioned occasionally; see Wilensky, 1964). Given the differences in environment, expectations, and *raison d'etre*, what can the business community do in order to satisfy these two hallmarks of professionalization?

Brech's answer, and perhaps the point that was not expressed verbally during his presentation as effectively as he might have wished, called for Britain's managerial class to 'grow up' and assume main responsibility for the wealth-creation process on behalf of the country. In his own words, he wanted both managers and directors together to "recognise, accept and acknowledge their inherent fundamental responsibility for the attainment and maintenance of wealth-creation in provision for the livelihood and well-being of the nation's community". This view does not dismiss the important groundwork carried out by politicians who create an environment designed to provide opportunities for businesses to succeed. Brech imagined businesspeople becoming the advisors to these policy-makers in this respect and thus playing a central role in securing the future economic well-being of the nation.

He saw clearly that his vision of an enhanced role for a business 'profession' advising policy-makers on the best way forward economically within British society remained a long way from realization. He frankly admitted that there was a desperate need for Britain's managerial class to address their own "totally inadequate recognition of [their] professional responsibility for the wealth and well-being of the community". To address this successfully would require a number of institutional changes across the whole field of management, including bringing the previously separate managerial and directorial organizations either fully together (or at least much more directly in harmony with each other), and by bringing the academic business schools – by 2005 these were ubiquitous within British universities – and management practitioners into a much closer relationship. Brech called for nothing less than a total revolution in the way managers received their training, behaved on the job, and understood their role in society.

Here, then, we have arrived at the fundamental element of the challenge referred to in the title of this chapter: how can all of these groups of people, all with different agendas and perspectives, come together to agree on what the role(s) of managers will be in modern life and thereby get managers and directors, as a sort of 'officer class' within UK business, to internalise

responsibility for carrying out the nation's long-term wealth-creation function? How, in short, can they be brought together to form a single, if diverse, 'profession' of management?

Final Thoughts

The changes that Brech sought in 2005 are not qualitatively unlike those sought by Elbourne during the 1920s, Lyndall Urwick during the 1950s, or the advocates of university management education in the 1960s. All of them sought to elevate the status of managers in the esteem of British society by doing two main things: associating the activity of management with a codified body of knowledge general enough for use by all managers thereby creating a 'science' of management, and establishing a code of conduct which could inspire confidence in outsiders that qualified managers behaved ethically and correctly with respect to the law but perhaps more importantly the needs of the nation as a whole. After the 1980s the prevalence of collective action in economic activity declined as union membership decreased and workers of all levels, including managers, grew more individualized. Thus for the past thirty years it has been hard to conceive of a united management profession of the sort envisaged by Brech. As the forgoing tried to illustrate, Brech took a long-term view along the lines of those writing in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century.

Like Brech, Wilson and Thomson (Wilson and Thomson, 2006) revived the long-standing discussion of the theme of the professionalization of managers in *Making of Modern Management*. As one of four main themes in the book, they trace the difficult history of British management professionalization in a valuable way by outlining how inadequate training, weak professional institutes, poor social status of managers, and ineffective dissemination of important writings by management theorists combined to undermine professionalization efforts through the end of the twentieth century. Although the Chartered Management Institute received its royal charter in 2002, the CMI remains a long way from realizing the goals set for its predecessor body, the British Institute of Management; the BIM was established shortly after the Second World War by the Attlee Labour Government in a largely failed attempt to repair the perceived deficiencies of Britain's industrial and commercial leaders. Poor choices of leaders early in the Institute's life and the stigma of being a Labour Party creation hampered its progress and severely limited its effectiveness for more than two decades (Larson, 2003).

There are, of course, substantial obstacles in the way of this transformation today and they operate on a variety of levels. Conversely, we have seen recently that a large and complex economic crisis led people to reconsider the goals of management education; this is a necessary process for Brech's professionalization dream to be realised. The codification and transmission of a body of specialist technical knowledge about management happens primarily, though not exclusively by any means, in business schools. In wake of the 2008 banking crisis there arose a significant call for a thorough restructuring of the economic system and, therefore necessarily, of the educational systems which cater to it. Advocates of that restructuring must be disappointed today in the small amount of change that has taken place in formal management education institutions. Syllabi for management courses remain largely as they were before the crisis, though with perhaps slightly more emphasis on corporate governance or ethical business practices. The 'quantification' of management education decried by authors like Locke and Spender (2011) continues to dominate the leading business schools; whether this results from what students want to learn, what staff want to teach, or for some other reason is hard to say. This chapter highlights the importance of *contextualizing* the learning that students do in business schools in order to overcome both a strong presentist bias in management education as well as the quantification bias identified above. Pursuing this contextualizing mission is a contribution to the education of future managers for which historians are eminently well qualified, yet for many years business historians remained marginalized in both business and management schools and, to a slightly lesser degree, in history departments. Therefore few universities have programmes directly in the area of business history, and these tend to be based in history departments rather than business schools. Business historians, therefore, would be wise to follow advice offered from a number of voices both within and outside of business history to make their research and publications more relevant for a wider management studies audience.

Publications like those of Maclean, Harvey, and Clegg (Maclean et al., forthcoming), Bucheli and Wadhwani (Bucheli and Wadhwani, 2014), and others offer guidance about how scholars might do that. They call for a better integration of historical techniques with organizational theorizing so that business and management theory is better grounded in historical reality while making the field of business history more meaningful to future generations of scholars and students. Ideally the contextualization process will help practitioners gradually become more sensitive to the needs of the business as well as the community in which the business operates. It

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would be unrealistic to think that someday every management decision would be made in favour of the 'big picture' issues facing practicing managers, but it could represent a reasonable and rational advancement of a process which made slow progress throughout the previous century. Today, student numbers in university business and management courses in the United Kingdom remain healthy at over 220,000 students across full-time and part-time programmes, representing just under 10% of the total number of undergraduates registered at UK universities.[6] Not all of those students will rise to positions of prominence within the world of business, but if the ones who will could be educated with the sort of historically-informed community-mindedness that Brech advocated, it might begin to turn the tide in favour of the sort of developments he hoped to see.

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[6] See Table 4 at https://www.hesa.ac.uk/free-statistics. The figure is over 11% for full-time students and half of that (5.6%) for part-time students. Accessed on 8 Feb 2016.

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