1 Introducing Management: Art or science?

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Question, question and question once again. Take nothing at face value, and come to your own evidenced, considered, and reflected upon conclusions. Push at boundaries when you encounter them, and don't worry about leaving your comfort zones. Reflect upon the story of the traveller, who when walking past some elephants in a park suddenly stopped. He had noticed that these huge and beautiful animals were being held by only a small rope tied to their front leg. No chains, no cages, only a rope no thicker than a finger. It was obvious that the elephants could, at any time, break away and escape, but for some reason, they did not. The traveller asked why they simply stood there and made no attempt to get away. "Well," their keeper said, "when they are very young and much smaller we use the same size rope to tie them and, at that age, it's enough to hold them. As they grow up, they are conditioned to believe they cannot break away. They believe the rope can still hold them, so they never try to break free." Amazing. These animals could at any time break free from their bonds but because they believed they couldn't, they were stuck right where they were. Like the elephants, many of us go through life hanging onto a belief that we cannot do something, simply because we failed at it once before.

In the Social Sciences (management is probably a Social Science but more about that later) we are intrinsically more concerned with the intangible, soft and fuzzy aspects of life. There is a paradox in Social Sciences. Given the apparent fluidity between intangible concepts, you might expect interdisciplinary work to flourish. However, that is not the case. The reality is that in order to protect identity, many disciplines enter into a form of rhetorical and theoretical protectionism. Fields of study erect imaginary boundaries around their areas of enquiry, attempting to quarantine other research areas in case they reveal that, god forbid, they are all actually talking about the same thing!

Often in academia we hail ourselves as being the torch-bearers of the way things ought to be done, however, interdisciplinarity is a utopia often stifled by hubris. So, taking one step back, what is the purpose of a university? When welcoming the opening of the Harvard Business School, Alfred North Whitehead reflected:

> The universities are schools of education and schools of research. But the primary reason for their existence is not to be found either in the mere knowledge conveyed to the students or in the mere opportunities for research afforded to the members of the faculty… The justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest for life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning…

In the idealised university environment, science discovers – engineering applies – business sells, and in return funds science. However, in order to develop, we must keep questioning what we see around us – take nothing as certain.

As a 24-year-old Professor of Natural Philosophy, Galileo Galilei often sat on the floor of the Cathedral in Pisa, watching the different sized lamps that lit up the building swing back and forth, and one day he realized that they all swung at the *same* speed. He decided to time them. He used the pulse in his neck to measure the period of each swing of one of the smaller lamps. Now, of course, a natural scientist would tell you that his pulse may not have been a constant and a social scientist would be interested in the levels of excitement that his pulse demonstrated, but that is not the point of this introduction. Galileo then timed a larger lamp and found that it swung at the same rate as the smaller ones. He borrowed one of the long candles used to light the lamps and swung both large and small lamps more vigorously. Over many days he timed the lamps and found that they always took exactly the same amount of time to travel through one complete arc. It didn't matter how big the lamp was or how big the arc was. Heavy lamps fell through their arc at the same rate as lighter lamps. Galileo was fascinated. This observation contradicted a 2,000 year old cornerstone of beliefs about the world. Through questioning and observation he disproved Aristotle's central theorem that heavier objects fall faster because they weigh more.

Through observation, questioning and crossing disciplinary boundaries Galileo changed the way we think. Admittedly, things took a turn for the worse when he engaged in interdisciplinary work with theology, found himself on trial by the Inquisition, and was charged with heresy in 1616 and again 1633 – clearly a slow learner! Still, Pope John Paul II vindicated him a mere 350 or so years later, praising his intuition as a brilliant physicist and his pioneering of the experimental method. Rest assured that that your rehabilitation from any scholarly setbacks will not take that long! When we engage in interdisciplinary

work we must avoid the temptation to become beige and banal; we should embrace the differences in the way we see the world. The creative spark can be seen most brilliantly in those differences. Only when we encounter a threshold and cross it do we get a better understanding of what the status quo truly is.

Allow interdisciplinarity to challenge the preconceptions of management; to broaden our scope of research interests; to embed a culture of collegiality that transcends departments, schools, faculties, colleges and so on, and to set up a foundation for paradigm shift in a more comprehensive manner than discipline-centric research. Be like Galileo, and not like the elephants, when studying management question accepted norms and carefully observe the world around you, cross disciplinary and cultural boundaries, be true to yourself and never give up!

The beginnings of management in the Ancient World

The following swift foray into the history of management further reveals the vital power of interdisciplinary collaboration. An understanding of the past not only helps us to follow the various ideas and approaches that lead to our present, it also allows us to see the way in which innovation is inspired by the necessities presented by specific social and cultural contexts. Although the term *management* is relatively new, finding its way in to the English language in the late sixteenth century, basic managerial techniques have been required since civilisations began to develop. To understand the evolution of management one must look at the world as theories and ideas developed. The focus in the ancient world was local, and revolved around a basic need to create a civilisation and protect it from rivals. As the world evolved, trade between civilisations, nations and continents grew, and with this evolved new requirements of management. The rapid and relatively recent development of industry and technology leads us to our current position, yet these seemingly exponential leaps would not have been possible without those first steps.

There are no management textbooks from the ancient world, however there is a lot of evidence to prove that very competent management existed. For example, it is unlikely that the Great Pyramid of Egypt (2650 BC) was a spontaneous act, and that the Great Wall of China (c. 700 BC) suddenly appeared without some sort of coherent management. Egypt and China are excellent examples of early management. Egypt had a complex, centralised bureaucracy that permitted only Pharaohs to make policy, and Viziers ran the administrative system that allowed large scale building to be undertaken. In China, Confucius became a leading light and created a system with a lasting impact. His life (551–479 BC) coincided with a period of instability in China known as the Warring States

period, and he sought a system that restored peace and order by prioritising the group over the self. 'The Way' preached loyalty to your leader, be it the head of family, institution, community or state, with the belief that this would ensure the nation remained at peace. A leader in early management ideas, this influenced almost all areas of Chinese business up to the Revolution in 1949. Early China was also heavily influenced by Han Fei (280–233 BC), who believed severe punishments should be issued for those refusing to follow the system of ethics enforced by law. Adopted by Qin Shi Huang (260–210 BC), this became the cornerstone of Imperial China's bureaucracy, following his conquering of all other warring states and uniting of China in 221 BC.

In Europe, Plato (427–347 B.C) was, in part, codifying management, looking at the problems of administration and the division of labour. For example, Plato stratified the provision of hospitality for travellers in the Greek city-states, and introduced the concept of formal hospitality management. As civic life begins to develop, travellers are to be treated hospitably, but not all guests are to be treated equally. In his 'Laws' (12:952d–953e), Plato details types of travellers who are to be welcomed but treated differently according to their rank and station. This is summarised in Table 1.1, which also highlights the purpose of their visit and the hospitality that must be provided to them.

Typology	Reason for visit	Hospitality provision
Merchant	Trade/business	Received by the officials in charge of the markets, harbours and public buildings. Special care must be made to stop them introducing innovations.
Cultural visitor	To view artistic achievements	Hospitality at the temples, friendly accommodation. Priest and temple keepers are responsible.
Civic dignitary	Public business	Civic reception, must be received by the generals and public officials. Home hospitality with a public official.
Occasional high-status cultural visitor	To view some unique cultural aspect	Must be over 50. He is a welcome visitor of the rich and the wise. Guest of those in charge of education or those with special virtue.

Table 1.1: Plato's stratification of hospitality management

This formal stratification of the hospitality provision and the growth of relations between the city states gave rise to the office of *Proxenos*, who was literally the 'guest-friend' or official hospitality manager of a city-state, looking after the interests of travellers from a foreign state in his own country; for example, the Spartan *Proxenos* in Athens was an Athenian citizen. There was a covert side to the *proxenia*, which could function as both an overt and a covert intelligence system. Representatives of this institution were indeed in an ideal position to