

Word from the Guest Editors

Business schools: Between criticism, resistance and change

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Word from the Guest Editors

Business schools: between criticism, resistance and change

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Critical approaches are today the subject of repeated and serious attacks inside and outside universities, all over the world. What's more, they are probably one of the keys to meeting the complex and varied global challenges we are currently facing. Not only in a deconstruction project to which they are often assigned out of laziness, but to shed light on the possibilities of transformation. Business schools bear their responsibility in the production of a broken and drifting world, and in various aspects. Critical studies contribute to this de(re)construction work of knowledge, identities, practices, and discourses. They still insufficiently question, and this is particularly true in the French-speaking world, the very frameworks of (co)production and the transfer of knowledge, which is particularly destructive: business schools, *our* schools. Creating critical spaces. Since 2012, a community has been formed around critical management perspectives, under the impetus of the *Université de Louvain*, *Université de Paris-Dauphine*, and *Université de Montpellier*, and manifests each year through the organization of a doctoral seminar. In October 2019, the *École des sciences de la gestion* of *Université du Québec à Montréal* organized this seminar and hosted a research day dedicated to business schools, objects of criticism but also actors of resistance and of (their) transformation. *Management international* agreed to publish a call for contributions dedicated to these issues. We have put together a selection of papers after an evaluation process following the usual rules. We would like to thank all our colleagues who have supported us through the review process in a gracious and demanding manner.

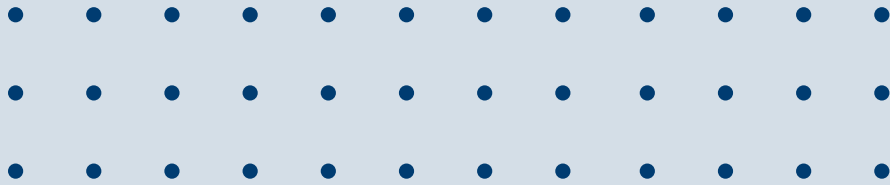
This essay begins with an article by guest editors that situates the issue within ongoing conversations in critical management education. The essay surveys several major issues that challenge and should concern business schools both as social actors and as organizations.

The classroom holds a special place in this issue, as a place to experience the critical possibilities of transforming business schools. The first three texts

invite us to reflect on the ways in which critical teaching can be led to break away from the overhanging position of the teacher mastering and delivering the right way to be critical. It is a matter of allowing a variety of critical operations to emerge in students without hierarchy, of accepting and receiving the unexpected, the disruption, specific to the (organizational) world and to learning, and finally to creating possibilities of connection with this world.

Emmanuel Bonnet, Pascale Borel, and Daniela Borodak question the possibilities of aesthetic experience as a lever for transforming management education to respond to the criticism of business schools. For the authors, it is a question of considering the sensitive aspects of the learning experience, rather privileging abstract, and normative models. They propose, from a pragmatist perspective, to consider the test of trouble, whose outcome is not predictable, as a vector of transformation. To do so, an ethnographic observation leads them to study how an immersion workshop in a business school unfolds: students are led to create and realize in four days a model taking as a starting point a voluntarily not very defined theme. The article highlights the importance of a defined trouble as an attentional opening to the unpredictable, which could benefit the transformation of teaching in business schools. The authors illustrate the importance of reinvesting in the learning space, defined as an experience to be lived, making manifest unrealized but present possibilities in business schools.

Management education is still dominated by models, devices and recipes that seem to be little disturbed by the repeated crises we are experiencing. Jean-Luc Moriceau, Isabel Paes and Robert Eahrhart suggest that the removal of affect from the understanding and experience of organizational life constitutes the greatest pedagogical challenge. The film can then detach itself as a "function" of illustration or a metaphor of management, or even of manufacturing new managerial recipes. It allows the intrusion of life and of the world within management by creating restlessness, by affecting the gaze, by making speech emerge



but also silence or by constructing fertile gaps. Moreover, the experience of a class around a film links a collective of students to the world.

The text by Nicolas Balas deals with a major issue in critical studies in management education: the difficult reconciliation in a pedagogical approach between the critical normativity of the teacher and the capacity of students to generate their own forms of criticism. Faced with the impossibility of critical normativity to consider student emancipation, the author draws from Rancière's "method of equality" the concepts that allow us to overcome this paradox: the conditions of fabrication of the teacher's ignorance, the unconditional requirement of the student's emancipatory will, and the imperative of actualizing the postulate of equality. He attempts to experiment with these concepts within concrete pedagogical situations experienced within the framework of a research-intervention involving students. All in all, Nicolas Balas asks us about the conditions of minimal normativity that does not harm students and suggests abandoning any form of hierarchization of the forms of emancipation adopted by students.

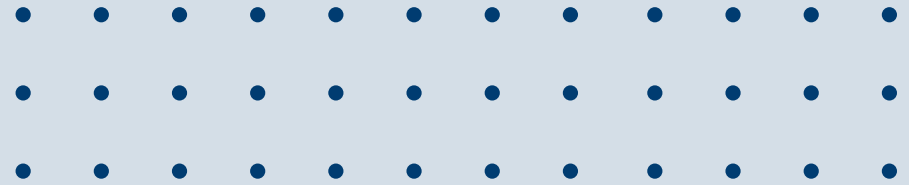
The following three texts question in different ways the possibilities of criticism in business schools, considered as instituted forms of education, in a deeply chaotic world, where the responsibility of the same schools can no longer be evacuated. Anthropocene is shaking the imaginations of all actors involved: students, professors, executives. The urgency of the issues at stake leads professors to develop forms of collective activism to change the framework of educational action and make more paradigms possible. The dominant ways of seeing things are also colonial or imperialist heritages with which Southern business schools must deal, subject to compliance injunctions, sometimes in competition. They develop imperfect forms of resistance through hybridation (crossbreeding) to resist possible epistemicide.

According to Diego Landivar and Sophie Marmorate, the absence of imagination adapted to the understanding and integration of climate issues, particularly in business schools, prevents the world of organizations from being aligned with the world of evidence of the Anthropocene. The authors have set up a pedagogical device in a business school aimed at bringing out new imagination aligned with a critical ecological and climatic situation. It is therefore a critical approach through immersion. Their investigation aims to understand the reception by stakeholders (students, professors, administration) and fully grasp the critical

stakes of the Anthropocene through the disruption of the imagination. The authors show the diversity of the imaginations produced by students by highlighting the variety of places of emergence of these imaginaries: at local as well as broad, media or ideological scales. They question their potential translation into actions or practices and point to the need to understand the support mechanisms that enable concrete change. Moreover, if the pedagogical experience highlights the way in which the Anthropocene questions managerialism, it also leads to consider the non-human as a place of production of a critical look at the world. Finally, the lack of previous ethical intent of the pedagogical experience makes it possible to understand the conditions of emergence of critical operations among students while producing highly risky learning situations.

Cédrine Joly, Myriam Kessari, Magalie Marais and Maryline Meyer question the role of teachers as actors in the transformation of their business schools at the same time. Through collective self-ethnography, the authors highlight the possibilities and challenges of resisting the intrusion of dominant forms into teaching and research practices around the social and environmental responsibility of organizations. They also consider the concrete possibilities of inventing and maintaining collective and activist forms of resistance. This reflective exercise allows them to demonstrate the identity work of teachers acting in the margins of a dominant system while meeting the requirements of legitimacy. They offer a range of daily resistance practices at work in their context and show how the activist collectively evolves over time as the evolution and renewal of the dominations takes place.

The article by Bilyaminou Dan Rani Guero and Birahim Gueye questions the critical and emancipatory capacity of business schools in the context of a relationship of north-south dominance that translates as much in partnerships as in the adoption of supposedly neutral quality standards. The authors provide a multisituated ethnographic study of the *Institut Africain du Management*, confronted with influences of its partners but also the competition between forms of domination. Behind a rhetoric compliant with the expectations of partners, the management school activates a logic of appropriation deformation that translates by undeclared practices of subversion of norms that allow a preservation of local cultural achievements. According to the authors, however, the hybridation process



does not lead to an idyllic hybrid model. They evoke the risk of “xessalization” which ultimately leads the hybridity to lodge itself on derisory spaces.

We are finally pleased to welcome three invited contributions, each of which reflects a different challenge posed to business schools, critical researchers and communities that recognize themselves in critical management approaches.

Ana Maria Peredo shares in her text the experiences of epistemic violence and injustice experienced in Business School by both teachers and students from Indigenous communities. She illustrates how Indigenous knowledge is systematically inferior in social interactions between peers and within the institution. A continuous reference to dominant knowledge that disciplines the researcher in the choice of his or her objects and ways of doing is accompanied by a symbolic violence that is exercised by words but also the reference to a social order. The few Aboriginal students trained in a business school are transformed by a training in the management of the global north into letters of the dominant liberal order that disciplines their communities. The numerous attempts to transform university curricula result in a virtual lack of willingness to broaden our ways of seeing things and to root the trainings in epistemologies, knowledge, Indigenous practices that are not consistent with dominant business assumptions.

With this, the parallel text offered by Sadhvi Dar provides a counter-narrative to Peter Fleming’s *Dark Academia* by shaking the books central logic and

assumptions around forms of resistance in British universities. More precisely, the author evokes the concept of Southernizing as a strategy aimed at contaminating hermetic norms of whiteness that structure the hegemonic narratives of the disappearance of the university in society. By mobilizing a writing policy that is both ethnographic and experiential, the text opens a space for stories rooted in lived experiences of activism in dialogue with various Others. The text contradicts the despair that underlies *Dark Academia*, by suggesting that the university is a site of struggle in which anti-racist and decolonizing movements struggle for their survival and their right to exist.

Finally, Martyna Śliwa and Ajnesh Prasad highlight the challenges of critical management approaches in the “individual” trajectory of the first during an exchange they had as part of a plenary session of the Academy of Management in 2021. Ms. Śliwa expressed the need to balance institutional pressures that force productivism with the passions for research but also avoid burning out and overworking. It also invites the CMS community to be organized in the way its members would like the world in crisis to be organized, by inventing alternative democratic forms. The organization of CMS is beginning to abandon hierarchical and exclusionary principles that have prevented the expression of pluralism but also produce an impact. We need to question our own practices. Be attentive and connect to all forms of spaces. Practice generosity.