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Back to the Future

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TRACK 46: Moving Ahead - Towards a Humanistic Turn in Management Theory and Education'

Track chairs:

Dirk Schneckenberg

ESC Rennes School of Business, Strategy

& Marketing Department, 2, rue robert d'Arbrissel CS 76522, 35065 Rennes Cedex, France. Tel:

+33 2 99 33 48 23; e-mail: dirk.schneckenberg@google.com.

Track Co-Chairs:

Dieter Euler

University of St. Gallen, Institute of Educational

Management and Business Education, Dufourstr. 40a, CH-9000 St. Gallen, Switzerland. Tel:

+41

71 2242630; e-mail: Dieter.Euler@unisg.ch.

Russ Vince

University of Bath, School of Management, Bath, BA2 7AY, United Kingdom. Tel: +44 (0)1225

384419; email:

r.vince@bath.ac.uk.

Ulf-Daniel Ehlers

University of Duisburg-Essen, Campus Essen Information Systems for Production and

Operations Management, Universitaetsstrasse 2, 45141 Essen, Germany. Tel: ++49 201 183 44

03; e-mail: ulf.ehlers@icb.uni-essen.de.

Abstract:

We are looking for contributions that rethink the curricular foundations and teaching practices of current management education. The conference theme highlights that what is needed is a perception of business that is well-grounded and allows at the same time to develop an epistemological position which does not reduce management practice to behaviour driven exclusively by negative assumptions of self-interest and *homo economicus* traits. Goshal (2005) argues that these pessimistic ideas on the human nature, which are taught in educational institutions and amplified by the phenomenon of double hermeneutic in social sciences (see Gergen, 1973; Giddens, 1987 and 1990) translate into future cynic behaviour of managers. Scholars like Pfeffer & Fong (2002) and Mintzberg (2004; also Gosling & Mintzberg, 2006) underline the assertion that management research and teaching is in deep trouble. If we agree to these viewpoints, then we have to face the problem at its very roots and to develop an alternative,

more positive view on the human factor in management education and practice - a view that the knowledge-based perspective can offer. When we follow the broad lines of argumentation in the knowledge management literature (e.g. Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Drucker 1992 and 1995, Malone, 2004; Nonaka, 1994) that (1) knowledge has become the most valuable means of production, that (2) knowledge workers own their means of production, and that (3) modern workforce loyalty comes not through the monthly paycheck, but through input and yield from knowledge in peer groups, it becomes clear that traditional models of management theory and practice have to change. The uncertainty of environmental contexts in a globalised competition landscape leads to a high dependency of firms on the capability of their workforce to learn and acquire new skills and competences to adapt to the changing external situations and job requirements. Insights on the value of knowledge as production factor and as basis for the rationale of organisations (Nonaka, 1994; Spender 1996; Davenport & Prusak, 1998) have led to a wide recognition that people are the most important asset for growth and employment in society and in firms (Drucker, 2005; Stewart, 2001). This is why scholars like Hamel (2007), Birkinshaw (2009) and Davenport (2006) call for a modern, post-industrial management mode that fit the needs of knowledge workers in the 21st century. The knowledge-based view can help to innovate the education of future managers in business schools and universities. The rising requirements that firms define for job profiles and that contemporary labour markets create for the employability of graduates (Lemieux, 2006; Goos & Manning, 2007; Katz & Kearney, 2006; Spitz-Oener, 2006) is pushing universities and business schools to reconfigure their curricular contents, structures and processes. Nowotny et al. (2001) postulate a 'mode 2' of knowledge production for science and higher education. Complex and interwoven problems of modern reality can only be investigated with context-driven, heterogeneous and transdisciplinary research approaches. The set of social and cognitive practices in mode 2 requires the unfolding of scientific mindsets in heterarchical structures and global networks. This position links back to well-established views of Argyris (1991) on double loop learning and Schön (1983) on the importance of reflective practitioners in management; it also leaps forward to positions of Boyatzis (2008) and Bates (2009), who demand a transition of learning outcomes for graduates from the transfer of qualifications to the development of competences. The increasing complexity that we face in modern business leads in consequence to a competence orientation – rather than mere knowledge transfer – in higher education. The future growth of firms increasingly relies on independent, self-confident and reflective knowledge workers - but both universities and business schools have to evolve their research bases and teaching pedagogies to develop graduates which are able to meet modern corporate workforce needs (Vince, 2009). The key question of this sub-theme is: *are our universities and business schools prepared to make graduates fit for the future of work?* We invite conceptual and empirical contributions to discuss change strategies for both research fundamentals as well as teaching practices of management education that tackle issues like: • how can we change the predominant negative epistemological positions of self-interest and *homo economicus* in management research? • what cultural changes are needed in higher education to face the workforce requirements of the knowledge economy? • how can universities become less teaching institutions and more learning environments to increase the reflection abilities and competence development of graduates? • how need curricula to be reconfigured to help students acquire self-regulated skills - such as abilities to process knowledge sources or the capacities to sustain high levels of learning demands? • in which way do learning routines of students have an impact on future capabilities of the workforce in firms? • how do organisational designs of curricula have to

be shaped to allow seamless paths between formal and informal learning of graduates? • how do established curricular contents of business education face the web-based democratisation of knowledge from expert systems to wisdom of the crowds? • how can communication and collaboration capacities of web technologies be deployed to deliver reflective learning modes at universities?

Keywords: management curricula, education innovation, knowledge-based view, capabilities of knowledge workers