

University, Ltd: Changing a Business School

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Abstract

This paper recounts two years in the change management of an European business school. Using evidence gained whilst I was an employee, I describe the conditions and institutional mechanisms which allowed an ‘earth shattering’ change programme to take place. This involved discounting the past and claiming that anyone who is against change is either self-interested or doesn’t understand the ‘real world’. The lack of collective and successful resistance is of particular concern here, since it suggests that (in certain contexts) academics are incapable of preventing their own institutions changing around them. Exit appears to be the only choice, when loyalty is questioned and voice impossible. I conclude with some observations on the relationship between the managerial business school and the idea of the university.

Keywords: Change Management, Managerialism, Universities, Performance Indicators, Business School.

Introduction

In 1970, the Marxist historian Edward Thompson and others lambasted the way in which one of the newer UK universities, their example being Warwick, was being shaped by ‘a particular kind of subordinate relationship with industrial capitalism’ (1970: 17). In their blistering account of Warwick’s early years, Thompson *et al* give a prescient account of the way in which business interests shaped the university, most notably in terms of the early establishment of ‘the brave new discipline of Business Studies’ with endowed chairs and an intention to produce graduates ‘who were well adjusted to enter industry’ (*op cit*: 60, 72). *Warwick University Ltd* tended to focus on the wider implications of such a shift, but shows along the way that a local form of hierarchical managerialism appears to emerge at the same time, in which older ideas about accountability and professional autonomy were being displaced. This speaking out paper focuses on another example of change, this time in a business school in a European university, and seeks to describe just how contemporary conditions combine to produce an even more intense case of managerialism than that which Thompson described over forty years ago.

Some time ago, I joined the staff at Euro Business School (EBS), part of Euro University¹. This was a place with a very ‘corporate’ reputation but a number of interesting colleagues and good departments. I rationalised my move in a number of ways, but the most relevant one here was the idea that I could have an influence on the direction of the sort of business

school that I had regularly criticised over many years (Parker 2002, 2008). However, I arrived at EBS just after the appointment of a new Dean who, in my opinion, was committed to a top-down change project which was to take the school in an even more hierarchical direction. What follows in this paper is a reflection on management and resistance, a description of one Dean's strategy of 'an earth shattering change programme essential for the sustained pre-eminence of our Business School'². This eventually led to my departure, as well as that of many other administrators and academics in the same period.

At the local level, this is a story of how one person, backed by senior university management, dismantled the existing structures and assumptions of the business school. This involved telling a particular story about the past, and positioning anyone who defended it as conservative, fearful or disruptive. It also involved tight control over the means of communication, including shutting down the means by which collective disenchantment could be voiced and ensuring that there was a small senior management team of well-paid academics (most of them appointed by the Dean himself) who would not question the direction that the school was taking. At a more general level, it is an account of just how a university department can articulate itself through the language of contemporary transformational management with journal article productivity, league table position and profitable products defined as its only criteria for success. Bear in mind that this is a business school which is part of a university on the edge of a deprived ex-industrial city in Europe. Bear in mind also that these events took place during a severe recession caused by the deployment of financial instruments which are taught in business schools and underpinned by the neo-liberal managerialism which is central to conventional business school teaching (Locke and Spender 2011, Pearson 2012). One might have thought that the rethinking of business schools would have moved in the opposite direction, given such circumstances.

There has been much work recently on various aspects of the new university, particularly in the context of the business school and the sort of knowledge that it produces and the labour that it demands (Worthington and Hodgson 2005, Tourish et al 2010, Beyes and Michels 2011, Rowlinson and Hassard 2011, Clark et al 2012). This paper adds to this literature by drawing out some implications of the EBS case, most particularly in terms of the failure of academics to resist the sort of changes that they have so often identified as taking place and not liking very much. Much critical work on organizations from the earliest elements of industrial sociology onwards has been concerned to explore the limits of managerial power and the constant potential for resistance (Jermier, Knights and Nord 1994). In EBS, despite the fact that one of the groups contained a strong concentration of industrial relations specialists, resistance appeared to be limited to exit (Hirschmann 1970), with almost no sustained collective counter voice to the Dean's strategies. So, why was dissent so muted, and what does this tell us about the capacities of responsibly autonomous professionals to resist the managerialism that they teach about?

I do not pretend that this is the only account of this affair³, or a comprehensive account, or that I am an impartial witness to events. Everything in this article is clearly my opinion. The

very fact that I have left and chosen to write this piece says enough about my motivations and it is obvious that other key players from EBS management will tell this story differently. However, the persuasiveness of my account depends on the way that EBS develops over the next few years. This short essay might be a credible document of the preconditions for one particular organizational disaster, or a footnote which merely documents minor resistance on the road to EBS becoming 'the leading business school in Europe'. There is no one account of what happened, and what it all meant depends on who wins and who loses. But that is rather the point with questions of power and resistance, because we are always stuck in time and place, and never able to see anything but stuttering moments.

University Ltd

Euro is not a university which has ever been encumbered too much by Cardinal Newman's 'idea of a university' (Collini 2012), by a sense of itself as inheriting ancient institutional traditions or contested and contradictory commitments. Indeed, since its founding in the 1970s, it has maintained this sense of itself as being one of the most commercially astute universities in Europe. It maintains a large university conference park, owns a number of profitable spin off businesses, and continues to expand in terms of estate and student numbers. In 2010/11, out of its e500 million revenue, nearly a quarter came from its commercial activities. The 'adhesive relations with industrial capitalism' which Thompson described at Warwick in the 1960s (1970: 77) are manifested at Euro in a posture which glues the university to post-industrial globalization. Indeed, the sort of action and speech which is valued is thoroughly shaped by contemporary market managerialism. In a staff newsletter, the Director of Corporate Relations said the following –

'If I could change one thing at Euro it would be ... to improve the alignment of incentives of stakeholders with the best interests of the University and the local community as a whole. This would involve significant and painful culture change but would be a good test of our resolve to be truly distinctive.' (Euro University 2012: 11, bold in original).

It's difficult to know what this means, and mock interviews in staff newsletters are a peculiar form of speech, but it is clear that the message is an uncompromising one and the language is borrowed from contemporary business unitarism. This is change management at its most strident, as a project which attempts to ensure that all parts of an organization 'share' values. Or, to put it a different way, to ensure that there is no disagreement with the corporate line, and that academics and students know their places and their 'best interests'.

Given this sort of context, it isn't surprising that Euro Business School is a particularly intense form of this sort of speech and action. The Business School was founded in the 1970s, and thirty years later employed about four hundred FTE academic and administrative staff who service undergraduate, MBA, specialist masters and PhD courses, and had an income of e60 million. On his appointment, the current Dean was keen on articulating a new vision and mission for the School –

‘The **vision** of EBS is simply stated: to be the leading business school in Europe.

‘This vision is accompanied by three **missions**:

1. to produce cutting edge research that can shape the way businesses are led and managed and organizations operate;
2. to produce socially responsible, world-class, creative managers and leaders who, regardless of the size of their organization, think on an European scale
3. to provide a return on investment for students and alumni over their entire careers.’

This ambition was clear and unapologetic. Unlike most visions and missions, it was also to be taken seriously, and not treated as a bit of puff for the website. This was part of the business university after all, and as one of the two new straplines rather threateningly put it ‘EBS: We are the business’.

‘EBS: We think about things in a different way’

In a recent national audit which determines elements of research funding and has important reputational implications, EBS came outside the top three on grade point average. This was widely understood by senior management within the university to be a disaster. Given that there were almost 100 entries to the exercise, and that EBS won the 4th largest amount of baseline research funding, the labelling of this result in this way was not a given, but reflected the very high expectations of the university and the relative decline from 3rd position in an earlier exercise. Euro had to be the best, ‘in the elite of the world universities’ by 2015 so EBS had to be the best. The fact that it was already one of the best, one of the biggest, and a substantial generator of income for the university was not enough to save it from being earmarked by the senior management team of the University for radical changes. EBS was deemed to be failing. Its management was widely claimed to be ‘complacent’ and its administration deemed to be ‘bloated’. Despite a gross surplus of over one third, something like e20m for the year, the school was narrated as making insufficient cash contributions to the university because it wasn’t well focused on its markets, and to have been insufficiently robust in managing its researchers. The old Dean left, derided for being absent and allowing the Business School to drift, and an interim Dean held the reins whilst a replacement was sought. The search process was put in the hands of a well-known headhunting company with ‘good in the seminar room and good in the boardroom’ emerging as the description of the desired candidate. Credibility in both academic and business camps was essential, but also the idea that the new Dean was to be a dynamic change agent who wasn’t afraid to take tough decisions. So it was that Professor Patrick Morrissey⁴ began his tenure, and I was one of his first appointments.

Morrissey came to the job from an impressive academic background in international banking, and after several years as a director at a large financial organization. From the start, it was clear that he intended to occupy the post in the fullest sense, and was not short of hyperbole in describing what he wanted to achieve. In his inaugural staff meeting, he told his audience that 'together, we can fly like hawks', and a string of interviews in the European press accompanied by determined looking photos of the 'silver haired' Morrissey followed. His interest in the cinema, and in collecting ceramics, were often mentioned. There had been some apprehension about his arrival among EBS employees, but little sense of the speed and violence of the changes that were to take place. One of the new Dean's first acts on taking up appointment was to call the existing Associate and Deputy Deans and some senior administrators into his office (starting at 8.15am with each meeting lasting less than 15 minutes) to tell them that their administrative posts were dissolved with immediate effect, since new organizational structures and management processes were on the way. Within a few months, the existing committee structure was being dismantled, Heads of Group were being replaced, increasingly by new recruits, and the departures among senior administration and academic staff were beginning. Symbolising these changes was a new corporate ID programme and a full set of new design parameters for the website, stationary, signage, and branded artefacts. There were also a series of images of various artefacts, explained with the strapline 'we think about things in a different way'. Despite enthusiastic promotion by the marketing and communications unit, local opinion within EBS was often negative, with questions being asked about its cost and relevance. Unsurprisingly perhaps, it was the academics who were most doubtful, but many administrators were beginning to become suspicious of just what this change signified too (Tananimi 2011).

Yet the asking of questions was becoming a dangerous pursuit. After a post-doctoral researcher used the EBS email list to query the cost of the redecoration of the Dean's office, and wondered whether the toilets could be repainted instead, the collective email was closed down. It was now no longer possible to 'reply all', and the individual concerned was disciplined⁵. The termly School Meeting (which is constitutionally the primary decision making committee in the School and is open to all staff) became an information session, with questions being actively discouraged and a stress on presentations from senior management, followed by an embarrassed silence or forced applause. More announcements about departures followed, including that of a very senior and long standing academic and previously Assistant Dean who had disagreed with the Dean on a matter of strategy; the newly appointed Research Dean who left with considerable rapidity for a post elsewhere; and the previous acting Dean who retired. All were clearly world leading academics, but found the new EBS not to their taste. Many of those departing were paid off with 'confidentiality agreements'⁶, and there were continual accounts, by their nature unverifiable, of serious and noisy disagreements at senior levels, and the procession of administrators and academics leaving continued. This included staff within the Dean's office, with at least three different PAs being announced during that period. Some of the teaching groups were being reduced to skeleton staffing, the committees that did exist were often cancelled or explicitly refused permission to discuss certain matters, and all the while the triumphalist tone continued with emails from 'The Dean' being signed 'upwards and onwards!!'

The following year, the university's staff opinion survey was published. The results for EBS were very poor, with clear evidence that respondents did not have confidence in the leadership and direction that the school was taking. Only 18% of respondents expressed confidence in the management of EBS, and 49 out of 253 responses answered 'yes' to a question about whether the respondent felt that they had been bullied or harassed by the Head of Department. It was obvious that these results were problematic, and an EBS working party was established with the remit to consider them and report back with recommendations. However, the working party was explicitly instructed that it was not to consider questions of strategy or leadership, but only communication. The Dean's email noted that 'it is natural for feelings of concern to be manifest during times of earth shattering change'. I was asked to sit on the working party, but when I queried its remit in an email exchange with the Dean, he instructed me to either accept the terms of the working party or not sit on it. I decided to accept the invitation, but the report which was then produced was predictably bland, with considerable use of the phrase 'it is felt that', and a focus on how misunderstandings could be avoided through better communication. The central questions concerning leadership style and strategic direction were simply absent. Instead, change was being presented as necessary and inevitable, with the only important disagreements relating to how effectively the message cascaded down from the Dean's office to the rest of the organization. As the Dean put it in his general email about the survey results 'We will continue to pursue this strategy, but we take your comments seriously concerning how the change process is managed and we will work with you to shape that change management in the future'.

Just as there were departures, so were there appointments. For the academics, there was an intense focus on measuring publications on the basis of the UK Association of Business Schools (ABS) list, which categorizes journals from one to four stars (Willmott 2011, Rowlinson *et al* 2011). The only publications that mattered were stated to be those in three and four star journals, and books or chapters were treated as effectively irrelevant for the purposes of appointment or promotion. The process of getting appointments past the Dean was reduced to counting the ABS scores on publications, and the actual application process became subordinate to finding a candidate and hoping the Dean would agree to a single person interview. There was seemingly no interest in evidence of skill in teaching, or of collegiality and experience of holding responsibility, and combative performance management interviews with the Dean underlined the point that ABS was all that mattered. Indeed, so little concern was shown about teaching that at least one member of staff who was deemed to be failing on ABS terms was paid a considerable amount of money to take severance, also subject to signing a confidentiality agreement⁷. The fact that he also happened to have won every teaching prize that EBS and the university offered appeared not to matter, suggesting that the student experience was not high on the priority list. The Research Dean expressed the aim of EBS in terms of total numbers of ABS four star journal articles, and a report was compiled which measured the success of each group in achieving on this measure. Despite the fact that future members of the external research audit panel repeatedly insisted that they would not be using the ABS list, it still continued to be ostensibly the *only* measure used in evaluating academics by EBS management.

Despite many individual attempts by EBS employees to express disagreement, the Dean appeared not to listen or care. Neither did the university, which continued to support the strategy. Every week brought an email about the leaving collection for another administrator or academic. Steep raises in postgraduate fees were pushed through against opposition from course tutors, Heads of Groups were appointed and moved on at regular intervals, and the regularly rotating Senior Management Team became comprised almost entirely of staff appointed by the Dean and increasingly disconnected from a sense of crisis amongst the rest of the employees. One Christmas, the Dean invited everyone to a festive party, and mulled wine and pastries were offered on the all staff email list. (Which did operate downwards, but not the other way). Several hundred chocolate boxes were purchased as gifts for the expected guests. Unfortunately, very few staff turned up, and so the Dean's PA sent a message to group administrators asking them if they would like to distribute the spare boxes amongst employees. Gradually, the Dean's PA's office was cleared of the tottering pile of boxes, and a week later there was another item on the all staff email about the Dean giving chocolates to children in hospital at Christmas. It was accompanied by a photograph of the Dean, and a small child with a broken arm.

A few months later, another even steeper rise in postgraduate fees was introduced against further opposition from many course Directors, and justified on the grounds that price is a signal of quality. At the same time, the Dean was giving newspaper interviews in which, under the headline 'Don't be Afraid of Success', he suggested that 'Business has become a lot more competitive, so unless you are moving upwards, you are moving in the wrong direction'. Soon after that, the trade union was informed that there might be up to 36 redundancies amongst the administration staff supporting these programmes. On many programmes, this would have meant that fees would have tripled in two years, whilst the administrative support would have halved. The combination of these decisions caused outrage, most evidently on a union discussion board which announced the 'at risk' notice. Denied the opportunity to comment in any other forum, well over two hundred mostly anonymous messages from current and ex academics, administrators as well as an external examiner, students and a job applicant displayed the deep divisions between those who were for and against the change programme. Most of the initial postings were very hostile. 'Anon1' said 'The guiding leadership principles seem to be vanity projects and macho management posturing. If concerns are raised in the open, those doing so are subjected to intense bullying.' 'EBS faculty member' said 'there's a sense of things being completely out of control and the University just washing its hands of it'. 'EBS person' chipped in with 'Morrissey is completely incompetent, and a nasty piece of work as well, and apart from those people in his inner circle (...) everyone in EBS knows it, and those who can leave are doing so pretty rapidly'.

As the comments continued over a two week period, other voices became more prominent, defending the Dean and attacking those who were complaining about him. There was much speculation about the identities of these people, and extremely acrimonious postings from both sides. This included attempts to attack the union representatives, both of whom were EBS academics. The divides were very clear, though this did not seem to be a

simple academic and administrator 'us' and 'them'. Instead, some people defended a hard working Dean who was shaking up a series of vested interests whilst others saw narcissism and autocratic management. And then, adding more fuel to the fire, there was the announcement of a Summer Celebration for all EBS staff and 'Fun and Games for All'. Initially, the website on which employees could indicate that they were attending was set up in a way that anyone could see who was intending to be there. After a day or so, this was disabled, so that people could indicate their attendance privately. Two years after the Dean's appointment, the paranoia and distrust had risen to a level where even attending a social event indicated political allegiances. It seemed to me that a miasma of fear and self disgust was now spreading throughout EBS (Gabriel 2012), with a large number of employees feeling helpless to intervene in changes that they disagreed with vehemently, but with only an anonymous message board to break the deafening silence. Just before I left, the Dean made an announcement, 'for information', about dissolving many of the existing groups and reconstituting new ones which involved many movements of academics between different departments within EBS. There wasn't even an attempt to pretend that consultation had happened, and the managerial prerogative was assumed, and unchallenged.

Change and its Management

'I have just stumbled on this thread. I have no connection with the EBS whatsoever and never have. I have never before witnessed such an outpouring of perturbation and angst associated with an organization of such high standing. From an outside perspective, in my experience, this points to distinct lack of either:

- A. Effective management
- B. Effective communication
- C. Effective strategy

All of which this august institution sells at a very high premium. Is it a case of do as I say not as I do (Bemused)?

The Crimson Assurance Company' (from the union message board)

The EBS story is an interesting one in itself, but in this section I will explore some of the broader issues that it raises. There are several components to the account I have given, but a key one relates to the legitimization of change itself. In order to do this successfully, it was necessary to ensure that the past was not available as a valid position from which to criticise the present. In other words, the past needs to be articulated as a problem, as something that needs to be escaped from, and this was something that seemed to be done relatively easily in this situation. The position in the state audit was the most easily available piece of evidence, and one that suggested that there were many underperforming academics within EBS. Lurking behind this was a diagnosis about the administration too, with the idea that there were too many administrators with overlapping responsibilities protecting their turf,

and that this cut into the profitability of the business school. It seemed to me that both characterisations were blamed on the previous Dean who was often described as being absent and disengaged. The truth or falsity of these characterisations is not the issue here, but the legitimization of the appointment of the new Dean required that they be in place. These stories about 'the old' needed to be available in order that 'the new' was presented as inevitable.

One of the most often repeated framings of what was happening was the idea that change was something that it took courage to embrace. Resisting change hence meant being conservative, fearful or self-interested. The actual specification of the new was rarely explicit, but usually expressed in terms of a negative comparison. The 'dead wood' needed to go, the old ways were inefficient, and had allowed for empire building and the feathering of nests. So, on the message board, 'EBS colleague' complained about 'colleagues that would prefer the easy life and the drift that accompanied it simply harp on about the old days'. Defending, 'the old days' was not an easy position to occupy, because it therefore meant implicitly defending a past which had been rejected. Several critical writers on organizational change have observed similar processes, and in various ways related this to a wider fetish of change (Lilley 1995, Sturdy and Grey 2003, Morgan and Spicer 2009, du Gay and Vikkelsø 2012, Gabriel 2012). Change is simply good, and nostalgia is bad. Looking forward to the new is hence the appropriate attitude for organizations and employees, unless they wish to go the way of the dinosaurs. This attitude to history also involved rewriting it. New academics were puffed in a press story on the website one month, and then left abruptly the next, with their profile being taken down immediately. Even the already published press releases were then rewritten so that bad news about the present was made unavailable.

Supporting the assertion that change is good in itself is a diagnosis of the present as being precarious, fast moving and competitive. The 'old days' weren't like that, being a place where bureaucracy could survive, but not any more. This meant that not only was nostalgia an inappropriate and self serving attitude, it was also a misrecognition of the present. In EBS's case, this was a 'challenging economic and educational environment where the level of competition among Universities and their business schools in terms of reputation, league table positions and student demand has never been greater'. Again, on the message board, this was translated into complaints about people who don't live in the 'real world', or live in the past. As 'Does it really matter?' put it, 'Wake up and smell the coffee is the expression that comes to mind.' During a recession, we are all tightening our belts, and working smarter and harder, so why should EBS be any different? Again, whether the present for EBS is actually that much more challenging is not the issue here. If a state of affairs is widely believed to be true, then it has consequences.

So for those who wished to contest the Dean's strategy and tactics, it was very difficult to argue against change itself. The politics or direction of change were matters that were difficult to surface because change was self-evidently a good thing. Often, the construction of a dissenter's argument would have to begin with a kind of disclaimer - 'I know change had to happen, but...' Indeed, it seems to have been the case that the very activity of

complaining was treated by some as evidence that change was happening. Satisfaction with the present translates into complacency. Several months after my arrival, I had a conversation with a senior university manager in which he suggested that the noises he had been hearing from people at EBS was proof that 'people's cages had been rattled', and he asserted that this was just what Morrissey had been appointed to do. The huge level of departures, retirements, severances, people off with stress and the results of the staff survey could not have been invisible to university management. Comments at exit interviews must have been fairly consistent, yet the university chose to take this as evidence that their strategy was working. The early backing of the Provost was always assumed to be crucial in this regard, but after several years of the Dean's strategy, it was also pretty clear that the university had now committed itself to a particular path which was going to be very difficult to turn away from without admitting that a huge error had been made. Unless a scandal emerged, the Dean was in place for the duration.

Conclusion: Universities and Resistance

'Is it inevitable that the university will be reduced to the function of providing, with increasingly authoritarian efficiency, pre-packed intellectual commodities which meet the requirements of management? Or can we by our efforts transform it into a centre of free discussion and action, tolerating and even encouraging 'subversive' thought and activity, for a dynamic renewal of the whole society within which it operates?'
(Thompson *et al* 1970: 166)

This is a single department, in a single university, somewhere in Europe. In a sense, it doesn't matter that much, and the story is clearly based on one person's opinion. Yet I want to claim that what happened at EBS raises absolutely crucial issues about the role and constitution of the university, and the capacity of academics to resist such changes. Collini (2012) and many others have argued that there was never a golden age for the university. Universities have always been changing, and have been different in different places at different times. Nonetheless, and as Thompson *et al* (1970) noted, the managerialisation of the university does represent the most important threat to the distinctiveness of the university as an institution. If it is entirely constituted and legitimated on the basis of narrow key performance indicators, of predictably obedient economic actors managed by someone who assumes absolute authority, then in what sense is it capable of providing the sort of autonomous reflection which justifies the idea of a university as a different space for thought?

This was a change process which entirely relied on hierarchical forms of decision making; the expectation that employees' values will be aligned; that management define the indicator and employees will perform; and the assumption that courses are products and students are customers. To an extent, these are changes which have been underway for some time (Parker and Jary 1995), but the intensity of these assumptions at EBS, in a business school

that sells management knowledge, was remarkable and may point to a future which many European academics will face. For example, the use of the UK ABS list effectively produced forms of academic labour which were intended to satisfy the *single* criteria of publishing in journals which were on that list. The content of a piece was irrelevant, because all that mattered was the fact of 'output'. Success at this strategy would mean money from the state, and more importantly in the long run, more money from students because EBS would move up league tables. Staff were useful only insofar as they delivered on this criteria and, as was clear from the practices of EBS senior management, would be rewarded and disposed of accordingly. ABS success meant a high salary and promotion, ABS failure meant entering a research management procedure involving very combative interviews with the Dean, and the eventual threat of dismissal. Given these criteria, the sort of employment relations being introduced into EBS relied on high pay but no particular expectation of a collective or professional orientation, or loyalty to or from the institution. The new professoriate were very motivated and skilled at getting articles into certain journals, and nothing else really seemed to matter, to them or to EBS. This was performance based Taylorism, with academics as tradable commodities based on the number of stars they had on their CV, so perhaps it should not surprise us that they might act in a self-interested manner. That is all that they were being expected to do.

The other element which is worthy of expansion here was the way in which senior management at EBS dealt with the issue of students. As I noted above, the specialist masters degrees earned a large proportion of EBS income, and this was clearly seen to be an area in which greater profits could be made. The proposed redundancies of administrators which provoked the thread on the union website was part of a strategy to take the masters degrees away from the groups that originated and taught them, cut administration costs, and raise prices. This was all justified by the Associate Dean responsible on the basis that price was a signal of quality⁸. There were no other justifications put forward other than economic ones, no suggestion that this would improve the student experience, allow for investment in teaching or curriculum innovation. It was this silence that seemed new, as if it were no longer even necessary to pretend that students mattered in any way other than the prices they pay for the 'products' which provide them with (as the mission statement has it) a 'return on their investment (...) over their entire careers'. The more you pay, the better something is. This may be described as a sort of realism, what Mankiw and Taylor call 'thinking like an economist' (2011: 21), but the lack of even a ritualistic nod towards the idea that education is a personal and social good was remarkable.

The difficult aspect of this for readers of this journal concerns the lack of resistance to these changes. A variety of research traditions – Marxism, interpretivism, Critical Management Studies, feminism and poststructuralism - have a considerable amount invested in the idea that management control can never be complete, and that resistance on the grounds of class interest, cross cutting identities, the spaces of microemancipation or the incompleteness of the social are always possible (Edwards 1979, Alvesson and Willmott 1992, Jermier *et al* 1994, Prichard and Willmott 1997, Thomas and Davies 2005). Indeed, it is precisely variants of this optimism about possibility which prevent critical work on organizing, including that

which discusses the university itself, from falling into a deterministic pessimism. Given that this workplace was a university populated by responsibly autonomous professionals, and that a particular group of these people were invested in these critical traditions as well as being members of the relevant trade union, one might have assumed that this was a place in which resistance was more, not less, likely. Yet this does not seem to have been the case. A transformational leader, given *carte blanche* by his managers, dismantled the organizational structures and material technologies which would allow collective discussion. There were complaints, to the Dean, to university management, to other colleagues, but they resulted in no alterations to the speed and brutality of the change programme. It seemed that, for many, the only thing that they could do was to leave – loyalty was inconceivable, voice was pointless, so exit was the only option (Hirschman 1970). As Hirschman observes in some later reflections on his book, his normative argument was intended to redress ‘the economist’s bias against voice and in favour of exit’ (1974: 448). Thinking like an economist appears to encourage the idea of substitutability in the name of efficiency, not encouraging voice or loyalty in order to reform from within,

We might look for various explanations for the ease with which this was done, and had I more space in this piece this is where the argument would have to go next. We might suggest that a buoyant labour market for management academics meant that exit was easy. Maybe the individualist practice and ideology of academic labour mitigated against collective activity, even in an unionized workplace. Perhaps the institution, like Thompson’s *Warwick University Ltd*, was simply intensifying what it had always been doing. Or the explanation might be that the change programme was carried out by someone who was extraordinarily bold in neutralising opposition and cultivating support from above. No doubt all of these factors partly explain what happened, but the fact remains that academics at one of the best business schools in Europe appear to have been powerless to do anything in the face of this onslaught. That should provoke some reflection on the conditions for resistance in any university, indeed in any organization. However, as I said at the start of this piece, it is still perhaps too early to say. A more secure judgment is only possible from the viewpoint of history.

At the end of my time at EBS, it seemed to me that this is a place that does now ‘look at things differently’, but the difference in this case is an intensification of performance indicator managerialism within an already highly managed university. It is *this* that is the difference, that there is no longer any pretence here, or any attempt to resist or apologise for reducing the ends of the business school to league tables and cash income which in turn feeds higher salaries for the professoriate. E P Thompson worried that business studies was a cuckoo in the university nest, ‘whose intellectual or social priority has not been seen to be established by any open democratic process’ (1970: 78). He was right of course, but in the last forty years (as this journal proves) the Western European business school has also been capable of being a site in which many interesting critical voices have thrived and have been involved in determining the trajectories of their various institutions. Universities are usually imagined as peculiar places with contested ends, and this assumption seems to have broadly shaped their business schools too. Yet we should not assume that this relatively permissive

form of management is inevitable or universal (Gabriel 2012). At the time of writing, the very idea of a democratic process at EBS sounds hopelessly slow and old fashioned, and would doubtless instead become a 'consultation exercise' on the communication of the Dean's strategy. Those who refuse to embrace change are silenced - either by shutting down all the channels of communication, or painting them as nostalgic ostriches who refuse to understand the brute realities of the brave new world.

I want to believe that management, research or teaching at business schools or universities does not have to be like this, and that leaving is not the only response to management regimes of this kind. The new business school within this particular business university might be the result of a kind of general path dependency or specific exceptionalism, but even then I do not want to assume that change only ever moves in one direction. At the time of writing, this example provides no evidence for anything else, but perhaps this Speaking Out paper can at least ensure that not all histories are written by the winners.

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² All quotations from emails, memos and websites have been altered in key details. I have all the originals. This particular quotation was from an email.

³ I have anonymised the case in order that it might be published, and this has meant altering many key details and not referencing the sources of others. I make reference to emails and documents which I have copies of, but have not cited anything which was marked 'confidential', as emails from the Senior Management Team became later in my time at EBS. Readers might want to consider who this anonymity serves, why it is necessary, and what it does to the representation of the case.

⁴ A fictional name.

⁵ Personal communication.

⁶ A strategy used at many universities. Again, personal communication.

⁷ Personal communication.

⁸ Email.