The Benefits (and Limitations) of Business History to the Study of Management and Organisations: The Example of the Global Diffusion of Management Knowledge

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This paper explores the contribution of a business history perspective to the study of management and organisational studies. While business history tends to be devalued within management academic groupings, this paper argues an historical approach to the study of management and organisational topics can not only provide a corrective to contemporary assumptions of the novelty of phenomena, but also prove useful in enriching conceptual debates and theories. However, to have a real impact in this area, it is argued business history needs to adopt a far more ambitious approach to theoretical and conceptual engagement in order to demonstrate its contribution and relevance. The paper uses examples from two recent studies undertaken by the author and colleagues on the history of global management consultancy to demonstrate the advantages of the historical approach for the study of management and organisation. The paper concludes by suggesting areas in which business history could have particular academic purchase in the study of management and organisations.

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