The Expansion of Management Knowledge: Carriers, Flows, and Sources.

Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson and Lars Engwall, eds. Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Books, 2002. 373 pp. $65.00, cloth; $32.95, paper.

This edited volume takes on a task that is highly ambitious: to explain how and why management knowledge has expanded so dramatically over the past decades. The unifying theme of the book is that management knowledge does not develop and flow automatically but is rather actively shaped, transferred, and transformed by a variety of actors and in a variety of ways. Accordingly, all chapters are deeply concerned with issues of process and go beyond the functional, demand-based explanations that most organizational scholars find lacking. Some chapters are entirely conceptual (e.g., Ernst and Kieser, Armbrüster and Kipping), while others are mostly descriptive (e.g., Luo, Byrkjeflot, Wallerstedt). The most noteworthy chapters are those that offer both strong theory and compelling data analysis, whether quantitative (by Ruef) or qualitative (by Røvik). Overall, the greatest strengths of this book are its ambitiousness and the way it directs attention to important yet understudied actors and actions. The geographic and temporal scope of the volume is also impressive, as readers are taken through Britain, Germany, Japan, Norway, Sweden, and the United States, with analyses ranging from the late 1800s to the present. As such, this volume will be of interest not only to management and organizational scholars but also to business historians.

The book begins with introductory chapters by the editors, Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, and John Meyer. The former chapter presents an interesting model of the interaction among business schools, consulting, practice, and the media that stresses both competition and symbiosis among groups. It is unfortunate that these ideas do not reemerge in any significant way elsewhere in the book. In his short introductory chapter, Meyer argues that four dimensions of globalization have fueled the expansion of management: the growth of markets and myths of markets; the weakened sovereignty of states; the expansion of "persons" and their rights; and the rationalization of the global environment. These developments, Meyer argues, have created a new "space" for management and organization, which various carriers have moved to fill. This chapter thus sets the context for the more time- and place-specific studies that follow.

The nine chapters that form the body of the volume are grouped into three sections: carriers, flows, and sources of management knowledge. Although the reader is often tempted to question the analytical and empirical distinctions between these classifications (e.g., Should management consulting firms be grouped under carriers or sources?), this chosen structure provides a useful way of organizing the book and of approaching the diffuse subject of management knowledge more generally. The first section, on carriers, deals with management consulting. Trying to understand the expansion of this activity, Ernst and Kieser develop a thought-provoking model in which managers' need for control drives the demand for consulting, and rather than satiating this

need, the consulting process actually exacerbates it. The result is a feedback system of addictive dependence on consulting that seems consistent with casual observation. Ruef's answer to the same question directs attention more to external factors than endogenous forces. He posits that consulting has benefited from (1) the hybridization and blending of traditional organizational roles (e.g., accounting, engineering, and banking) and (2) the externalization of management, which is itself driven by the spread of standardized rules of organizational conduct, corporate downsizing, industrial restructuring, and reduced careerism. To test these ideas, he analyzes the entry of MBA graduates into management consulting over the period 1933–1997. While the results mostly support his arguments, he unfortunately does not look for any period effects that might show how the influence of these factors has changed over time. Armbrüster and Kipping complete the section on carriers by arguing that conflict between consultants and their clients is inevitable because of the different types of knowledge prevalent within each form of organization: consultants carry general and change-oriented knowledge, while firms are dominated by regulation-oriented knowledge.

The section on flows of management knowledge begins with a rich comparative analysis by Røvik of the spread of three management practices: management by objectives (MBO), developmental dialogue (DD), and total quality management (TQM). Through content analysis of publications in Norwegian and English, he finds that management practices "flow" to the extent that they are socially authorized, framed as universal, commodified, well timed, harmonized with existing practices, dramatized, and individualized. Notably, the flow of management practices is neither a function of their intrinsic nature nor of evidence of efficiency. In their chapter, Walgenbach and Beck provide an interesting description of the spread of quality management practices in Germany. Unfortunately, they provide little in the way of causal arguments and offer an empirical analysis that is largely detached from their goal of applying ideas from the social movement literature to the spread of management knowledge. Tiratsoo rounds out the section on flows with a comparative historical study of the spread of American quality-management practices in Britain and Japan. An active industrial policy, employers more open to American ideas, and managers who placed greater value on technical skills all contributed to the greater adoption of these practices in Japan.

The section on sources of management knowledge stretches somewhat far afield and is the most difficult to connect with the purpose of the book. Luo describes how employee training in the United States has increasingly focused on personal skills and relates this trend to changing models of organization, but her discussion tells us little about the sources of management knowledge itself. Similarly, Byrkjeflot provides an impressive comparative historical account of the evolution of technical training in Germany and the United States but tells us little about how this has affected the expansion of management knowledge or how it is generated. Finally, Wallerstedt takes us through a richly detailed account of the

history of the accounting field in Sweden and explains how accounting firms have come to be carriers of management knowledge. Again, however, we gain little insight about how management knowledge is actually created.

In their concluding chapter, the editors highlight some implications of the research contained in their volume. They point to the self-sustaining nature of management carriers and knowledge. They rightly caution us to attend not only to the forces that drive homogeneity of management practices but also to those that lead to variation: the ambiguity of labels, the process of translation, the significance of context, and the political processes inherent in management expansion. Finally, they direct our attention to the impact of management expansion: the increasing importance for all to be able to speak the language of management and the reciprocal effects of management knowledge expansion and institutional change. They conclude their volume by urging more comparative historical studies.

It is perhaps inevitable that an edited volume with such an ambitious scope will fall short of answering the questions it set out to address. By the end of the book, readers are indeed left with more questions than answers. This is less a criticism of the volume itself than a reflection of the state of the literature on the topic. But more descriptive historical accounts, on their own, are unlikely to satisfy organizational scholars, in large part because this volume has already provided us with an excellent collection of these. While this book provides us with ample motivation, direction, and insights, few of the chapters offer rigorous, large-scale, empirical analysis. Perhaps, in addition to more comparative historical work, the many interesting models, frameworks, and observations found in this volume could be subjected to some integration, synthesis, and quantitative testing.

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Management Consulting: Emergence and Dynamics of a Knowledge Industry.

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In discussions on the purpose of business schools, I observe two opposing perspectives. In the first perspective, business schools are seen as academic institutions aiming at the creation of fundamental management knowledge and its dissemination. The second perspective highlights business schools as providing experiential management knowledge and is closely linked to management practice and management consulting. The ongoing discussion on business schools' orientations in terms of their "relevance" for practice reflects that it is not easy to reconcile both. Proponents of each of the two perspectives, however, claim to be involved in acquiring knowledge about management and

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