



Book review of Leo McCann, Ödül Bozkurt, Rachael Finn, Edward Granter, Carolyn Hunter, Nina Kivinen, Arun Kumar, & Brian Wierman (Eds., 2025). *Elgar Encyclopedia of Critical Management Studies*. Edward Elgar.

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Introduction

McCann et al.'s *Elgar Encyclopedia of Critical Management Studies* is a substantial undertaking that totals 546 pages in a two-column layout. It is part of the *Elgar Encyclopedias in Business and Management* series. The Encyclopaedia assembles 119 alphabetically arranged entries—from *Affect through to Writing Differently*—written by a notably broad collective of 132 contributors. Edited by Leo McCann, Ödül Bozkurt, Rachael Finn, Edward Granter, Carolyn Hunter, Nina Kivinen, Arun Kumar and Brian Wierman, the team brings intellectual range, editorial assurance, and an international perspective.

Laudably, the editors embrace the pluralism that can be found in Critical Management Studies (CMS): they sought breadth across topics and voices, pairing established figures with emerging scholars, and applied a light editorial touch to preserve distinct perspectives. After four years of coordination and drafting, the outcome is an intentionally varied, expansive, and timely map of a heterogeneous field. In scope and self-understanding, the Encyclopaedia maps the CMS terrain without pretending to resolve its arguments. Classic touchstones (class, critical theory, bureaucracy, labour process) sit alongside newer preoccupations (critical diversity studies, hauntology, modern slavery) and reflexive entries on CMS's own trajectories and critics. Methods- and style-oriented pieces (for instance, autoethnography, ethnography, 'writing differently') round out the mix. The result is a one-volume snapshot of what CMS has become: diverse, vigorously contested, and reflexive about its own boundaries.

CMS starts from an unfashionable yet important premise: much of mainstream management scholarship is narrow, technocratic and too often legitimises the harms produced by contemporary capitalism. Claims to managerial neutrality ring hollow. Management is a political practice that, in the aggregate, protects incumbents and reproduces inequality. In a period marked by widening disparities, conflict and exclusion, CMS insists on examining how management—as a profession, interest bloc and academic discipline—helps

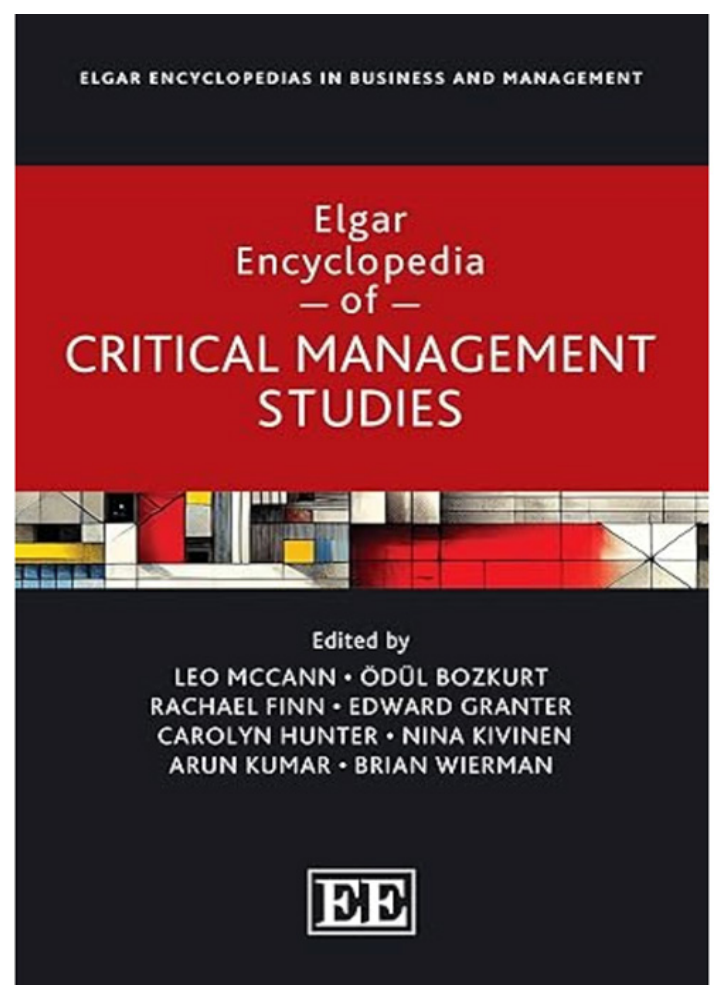


Figure 1: Book cover.

stabilise the status quo.

That insistence is hardly convenient in a 'post-truth' climate where parts of the right-wing media caricature universities as 'woke' citadels. Yet CMS has to some extent shaped teaching and scholarship—from gender, race and whistleblowing to toxic leadership, climate change, colonialism, global power relations, multinational corporate

conduct, management education, industrial relations and technological change. Intellectually, it sits alongside other 'critical' traditions (Critical Race Theory, critical sociology, Critical Theory), whose very prominence continues to attract concerted attack. The Encyclopaedia itself has entries on critical accounting, critical diversity studies, critical human resource management, critical leadership studies, critical military studies, critical pedagogy, and critical university studies (amongst others).

In case it needs explaining: Reviewing a CMS encyclopaedia in the *Journal of Applied Learning and Teaching* is warranted because, combined with critical pedagogy, it becomes a transformative toolkit for management education. CMS challenges mechanistic, hierarchical, technocratic models that naturalise the corporate–state order. Critical pedagogy (see the Encyclopaedia entry) supplies the praxis—problem-posing dialogue, co-designed assessments, and reflexive writing—that redistributes voice in the classroom and rehearses democratic decision-making for organisational life. Together, CMS and critical pedagogy reframe cases, discussions and briefs around power, externalities, labour, bureaucracy, modern slavery and 'writing differently', align with core learning outcomes (critical thinking, ethical reasoning, systems thinking, reflexivity), and travel across disciplines, from nursing to computing. The Encyclopaedia surfaces the hidden curriculum of power (audit culture; platformisation of higher education) and is timely in the AI/metrics age, asking who benefits, who pays, and what is rendered invisible. Integrating critical pedagogy within CMS is not optional—it is a precondition for credible claims to a responsible management education. While the whole content of the Encyclopaedia can be meaningfully used in higher education, depending on what you're teaching, I will highlight some of the more direct relationships between CMS and higher education in the following section.

CMS and higher education

Several of the Encyclopaedia's contributions speak directly to education. There are excellent entries on Business Schools and Management Education, Critical Pedagogy, Critical University Studies, the Establishment of CMS as a Discipline, and Responsible Management Education.

The Critical University Studies chapter reminds us that across the Americas, Europe, South Africa, East Asia and Australasia, market-oriented reform has entrenched managerialism. Universities are nudged from scholarly purposes toward management imperatives—restructuring, cost-cutting, performance indicators and compliance regimes. Audit cultures and workload intensification coincide with deteriorating staff wellbeing. Since the early 2000s, digital platforms have further recast pedagogy, curricula and academic roles. Academic freedom is squeezed by political and reputational risk-management, with a noticeable chill over gender studies, postcolonial and race-critical scholarship, CMS included. The Critical University Studies entry asks the question that should be on the mind of any educator: are universities custodians of knowledge and democratic life, or auxiliaries to market needs?

Martin Parker's chapter on business schools and management education is perhaps my favourite entry. This may well be due to personal bias and the halo effect, as I have read much of his outstanding work, reviewed his *Shut down the Business School* (Parker, 2018; Rudolph, 2018) and interviewed him (Parker et al., 2021). Parker acknowledges that the growth of CMS has been underpinned by the expansion of business schools in north-western Europe. Shut down the business school, and in many universities, CMS would be shuttered.

When reflecting on the current state of university affairs, it is useful to go back in history. Medieval universities depended on princely and episcopal patronage. Curricula were refracted through theology, and the wealthy were flattered in stone, portrait and syllabus. Today's equivalent is the business school's utilitarian promise. As a global product, business and management education now generates an estimated US\$400 billion annually in fee income across 13,000+ schools, with international students subsidising the wider university. Parker puts it bluntly: the university's claim to universalism is now subsidised by a single profitable subsystem.

That fiscal reality has smoothed the shift to corporatisation. Without it, radical cuts to government grants might have been politically impossible. Business school logics now permeate institutional corridors, and the very dominance that keeps the lights on risks hollowing out the idea of the university. In the overwhelming majority of programmes, most of the time, students are drilled in digital marketing, analytics, capital markets, branding, strategic human resource management and 'innovation', with scant engagement with political economy or the planetary boundaries within which any economy must operate. Perhaps it is time, as Parker suggests, to "shatter the glass atriums" (p. 47) and teach for modesty and historical understanding alongside domain expertise.

Fittingly, the Encyclopaedia refuses to naturalise its own foundations. The entry on the Establishment of CMS as a Discipline foregrounds CMS's methodological scepticism: orthodox claims to objectivity and neutrality are critiqued, with researcher beliefs, positions and behaviours treated not as contaminants but as part and parcel of the evidentiary field. Some contributors extend the critique to the research infrastructure itself—publish-or-perish metrics, disciplinary silos and hyper specialisation—posing a disquieting question: if a field unsettles the criteria by which disciplines are constituted, can it, or should it, call itself one?

Finally, Responsible Management Education (RME) synthesises a practical agenda. If business schools are to claim leadership formation rather than mere credentialing, they must align teaching, research and dialogue to develop graduates capable of generating sustainable value for business, society, and the environment. That is not a simple pivot. League tables reward graduate salaries; research assessment often privileges positivist, quantitative work; and institutional incentives tilt against slow, reflexive pedagogy. Yet the RME entry sets out a pathway that academics can engage with immediately: design assessments that foreground social responsibility, embed critical literacies around power and inequality, and treat environmental limits

as non-optional and constitutive of managerial reasoning. The Encyclopaedia thus offers its readers not only diagnoses worth debating but also footholds for practice.

Some cherry-picking

Of the 119 entries, "Hauntology" was new to me. Coined by Jacques Derrida (2006), the term puns on the near-homophony of "ontology" and "hauntology" (from haunting) to argue that the present is never self-contained, as it is threaded with traces of pasts and unrealised futures. In Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, the 'ghost' serves to model a non-linear history and the persistence of Marxism despite liberal-capitalist triumphalism. As a lens, hauntology aims to unsettle claims to solidity and necessity, surface the politics of what passes as 'natural', and question growth-and-progress narratives by keeping past, present and future in view.

Speaking of ghosts: unsurprisingly, Marx's spectre is never far in this Encyclopaedia, and the index alone sends one across more than two dozen pages. Personally, I have little patience for state communism or its apologias—and neither did major critical theorists. For instance, Marcuse (1985) mounted a sustained critique of the Soviet system, and Fromm contrasts "the real Marx, the radical humanist" with "the vulgar forgery presented by Soviet communism" and argues that state totalitarianism leaves the worker "in bondage" (1976, p. 25; 1956, p. 285).

Marx's early writings, however, remain a useful point of entry into the humanist core of his project, where alienation, labour, and 'species-being' (*Gattungswesen*—Marx's term for the human essence as our social capacity to transform the world through free, creative labour and to recognise ourselves in others) are framed not as dogma but as questions (Marx, 2007). The Encyclopaedia entry on Creativity notes that Marx saw creativity and artistry as defining human capacities, and his theory of alienation partly explains how capitalism constrains workers' innate creativity. My favourite Marx quote is his resisting the catechism built in his name: "Ce qu'il y a de certain c'est que moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste" [If anything is certain, it is that I myself am not a Marxist] (cited in Engels, 1882, p. 353). It is a salutary reminder that any serious engagement with Marx should be unsentimental, historically grounded and open to revision.

In that spirit, the Encyclopaedia's chapter on Marxism and Critical Management Studies is well-judged. The relationship between Marxism and CMS remains uneasy and unfinished. The second wave of CMS often policed even faintly Marxist perspectives. Karakilic, the author of the "Marxism and Critical Management Studies" entry, however, argues that Marxism is not a fixed bundle of doctrines, methods or party lines, but a living, evolving tradition. Perhaps with Marx's (1845, p. 145) 11th Feuerbach thesis in mind ("The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it"), Parker is cited at his most sceptical: "There is, to my knowledge, no evidence that any of the core work within CMS has made any substantial difference to the wider world" (Parker, 2023, p. 59).

I enjoyed the entry on Critical Theory and CMS. Seymour and Granter frame Frankfurt School Critical Theory in three generations, each shaped by different contexts, methods and diagnoses. The core of the first generation comprises Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, who analysed capitalist societies as structured by domination and inequality and retained a Marxian hope for less alienated forms of production and life. CMS drew on this tradition from the outset, notably in Alvesson's and Willmott's work. The second generation centres on Jürgen Habermas, who accepted many early diagnoses of fascism, consumerism, nationalism and instrumental rationality, yet defended the unfinished project of modernity through communicative rationality and warned that systems imperatives colonise our lifeworld. A third generation is associated with Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, which rejects first-generation negativism while arguing that Habermas's model misses the lived moral experiences of individuals. When I studied Sociology in Germany in the 1980s, the Frankfurt School critical theorists were some of my heroes, and writing our recent book on Teaching well (Brookfield et al., 2023) was a welcome opportunity to revisit some of their writings.

Both Marcuse and Angela Davis stress that critical theory must be self-critical (Davis, 1989; Brookfield, 2005). In the Encyclopaedia, this is also applied to CMS in a remarkable article titled Critiques of CMS. Klikauer and Campbell argue that CMS proclaims distance from mainstream management yet largely operates within it. They note frequent claims of Frankfurt School lineage but judge CMS far from Critical Theory's horizon of universal emancipation. They argue that CMS pursues micro-emancipation: better managers, fairer organisations, incremental fixes that stabilise rather than transform. Klikauer and Campbell posit that CMS functions as a junior partner to traditional management studies, offering system-stabilising "crypto-critique" (p. 152). By contrast, the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory treats management as inherently reproducing domination.

Other articles that I found fascinating are the ones on Corporate violence, Gaslighting ("a tactic of psychological manipulation intended to make someone seem or feel 'crazy', to make them question the legitimacy of their feelings and experiences" (p. 224)), Necrocapitalism ("contemporary forms of organizational accumulation that involve dispossession and the subjugation of life to the power of death" (Banerjee, 2008, p. 1541)), and Obedience.

Critical considerations

This is a wonderful book. However, an *Encyclopedia of Critical Management Studies* must be read critically, or the reader misses the point. My critical points are very minor when compared to the tremendous value this Encyclopaedia offers. Here they are. Some of the entries could have had more references—for instance, Martin Parker's outstanding entry on Business schools and management education. Due to the editors' admittedly light touch, the number of references per article can differ vastly. Also, the index could have been more detailed, especially when it comes to authors. For instance, Alvesson and other CMS gurus do not have entries in the index, though they are referred to

numerous times throughout the Encyclopaedia. There could have been more entries on the role of technology, such as AI, though there are entries on Big Data, Digital nomadism, Fordism, Gig economy, Hackers, Post-industrial society, and Surveillance, amongst others. Another issue is the high price: the hardback is listed at £265 (Elgar member price £238.50), with e-book options starting at £48. The pricing signals a library-first positioning, while the digital option lowers the barrier for individual scholars.

The chapter that I looked forward to reading the most, “Music and Revolution”, was the one that disappointed me the most. I should stress that this is less the authors’ fault, and more due to my long-standing interest in this topic. Jensen and Zawadki’s entry opens with real promise—Nietzsche’s Dionysian energies, Wagner’s total artwork, Marcuse’s indictment of one-dimensionality—before pivoting to MC5 and a sharp line on capitalism’s “destructive arrhythmia” (p. 321). But as I read on, the examples became increasingly one-sided (AC/DC, The Stooges’ Iggy Pop, and Slayer), and I missed elements I take to be central to any serious discussion of music and emancipatory politics. A brief nod to the Palestinian critic Edward Said and the Israeli conductor and concert pianist Daniel Barenboim, and to their Barenboim–Said Akademie in Berlin, for instance, would have shown how musical practice can serve as a space for intercultural communication, bringing together Arab and Jewish musicians with their German peers (Barenboim & Said, 2002; Ismail et al., 2024).

A highly suitable conceptual touchstone for the “Music and Revolution” chapter would have been Adorno. Music does not make revolutions. It resists by form (Adorno, 1997, 2006). Works that refuse reconciliation through dissonance, fracture, and structural intransigence make audible the unreconciled within a damaged world, and keep open the thought that things could be otherwise. ‘Committed’ music that foregrounds a message risks sliding into illustration, forfeiting the negativity that constitutes critique (Adorno, 1997). Under the culture industry, even protest styles are standardised and repackaged, training listeners toward passivity and producing what Adorno called a regression of listening (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002; Adorno, 2002). The political task is not to moralise art but to cultivate listening as critical practice (Adorno, 1997, 2002).

In this context, it is worth recalling that so-called ‘classical music’ has, at times, sparked genuine public turmoil. On the eve of the First World War, two premieres stand out. In Paris on 29 May 1913, Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* caused a near-riot. Its performance met sustained booing, shouting and scuffles (Caddy, 2025). One month earlier in Vienna, the so-called *Skandalkonzert* (“scandal concert”) collapsed during Alban Berg’s *Altenberg-Lieder*, with fistfights, a halted performance and a lawsuit that bequeathed the *Watschenkonzert* (“slap concert”) label (Calico, 2017). In the 1920s, George Antheil’s Paris recitals courted and received well-documented unruly responses, while his famous pistol-on-the-piano flourish appears to be his own mythmaking (Antheil, 1945; Whitesitt, 1983). Even in 1973, Steve Reich’s *Four Organs* at Carnegie Hall provoked shouts and attempts to stop the performance, a late-modern reminder that form alone can unsettle a trained audience (Reich, 2002).

Conclusion

Reading the Encyclopaedia alongside an MBA module on Business, Society, and the Environment and while drafting work on AI and leadership, made its utility obvious. Entries on Animals, Anthropocene, Critical Leadership Studies, Posthumanism, Power, Resistance, Sustainability, and Toxic leadership offered compact orientations with useful bibliographies to improve slide decks and the content of my writing. The book does what a field guide should do: it maps contested ground without smoothing it over and invites readers to test ideas in practice.

There are blemishes—uneven referencing, an index thin on authors, and a high price—but the strengths far outweigh them. If you teach or research business and management, this is the best single-volume reference for CMS. I highly recommend the book for critical reading. It supports redesigns of modules, anchors discussions of power and inequality, and keeps planetary boundaries at the centre of managerial reasoning. My verdict is simple: secure access and use it. Buy it if you can. Borrow it if you must. Just make sure you read this impressive and important Encyclopaedia.

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