



Huzzard, T., Benner, M. & Kärreman, D. (2017). *The corporatization of the business school: Minerva meets the market*. London, UK: Routledge.

Jürgen Rudolph

Head of Research, Senior Lecturer and Academic Partner Liaison, Kaplan Higher Education Singapore

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2019.2.1.17>

Since the 1980s, business schools have spread globally, and at present, there are more than 14,000 of them worldwide (usually as part of a university – with notable stand-alone exceptions such as the London Business School or INSEAD). This fascinating volume critically explores “the lived experience of those who inhabit the business school” (xii) and brings together first-hand accounts from the ‘front line’.

I came across this book as a result of reading Martin Parker’s *Shut down the Business School* (reviewed in the previous issue of JALT). This volume, edited by Professors Tony Huzzard, Mats Benner (both from Lund University) and Dan Kärreman (Copenhagen Business School and Royal Holloway, University of London), contains an excellent contribution by Martin Parker on journal publishing (that I was naturally very interested in) as well as 13 other thought-provoking pieces around global trends of corporatising business schools.

The past few decades have witnessed a Tayloristic shift, with global pressures of commercialisation and managerialism shaping contemporary business schools. To use Roman mythology, as the editors do: can Mercury (the god of merchants) and Minerva (the goddess of science and wisdom) get along? Or are their agendas contradictory? The book explores various aspects of commercialisation, such as global performance rankings (including school league tables, journal rankings, citations and international accreditations), branding, resource competition, competition for students, faculty and staff. Rituals of verification sometimes assess “not what its members publish but rather, where they publish” (2).

In chapter 2, Mats Benner (a co-editor) explores the historical evolution of the marketized university paradigm for contemporary universities with a broad brush. While historically, German universities had shaped the Humboldtian era of research universities with considerable academic freedom, US universities – that dominate in contemporary global ranking exercises – have heavily influenced the marketized university paradigm. It is this paradigm that is critiqued from a multitude of angles in the volume at hand.

In chapter 3, Dennis Tourish (Royal Holloway, University of London), Russell Craig (various universities) and Joel Amernic (University of Toronto) challenge the audit culture – a.k.a. a “mania for constant assessment” and “fast academia” (35) – which has developed in business schools (and universities in general) and critique it as damaging individual scholarship and threatening academic freedom. The New Public Management ideology is perceived as Orwellian, perverting concepts such as quality and professionalism. An illustration of the audit culture is the assessment of academic journals by quantified impact factors, and published articles by citation counts. An example of this ‘fetish for quantitative measurement’ is the University of Queensland’s ‘Q index’ in which academics essentially become a number. “The focus of such performance indexes represents a shift towards industrial measurements of productivity that do not involve serious considerations of intellectual quality” (36).

The audit culture may lead to a counter-productive gaming of the system, for instance through the poaching (rather than development) of research stars and the active encouragement by university managers to publish in easily-auditable A* journals (as opposed to books and book chapters, amongst other publications). Other negative consequences are staff disengagement and a focus on the quantifiable (such as journal impact factors and journal rankings metrics).

In chapter 4, Alexander Paulsson (Lund University) explores the implications of New Public Management policies on academic freedom. Business schools have taken the lead in the corporatization of universities – something that Martin Parker has coined “McUniversity”. I may as well confess that it amused me greatly when I read that the term Triple Crown in the so-called triple crown accreditation (consisting of EQUIS, AMBA and AACSB accreditations) “originates from some horse racing competitions in the early twentieth century” (66).

In chapter 5, Nick Butler (Stockholm University) and Sverre Spoelstra (Lund University) sarcastically seek to become less excellent in their engagement with the fetish of excellence at

business schools! They probe:

“Would it be an exaggeration to say that we target journals not because they publish interesting or worthwhile research but because they are highly ranked; that we collaborate with esteemed colleagues not because we value their input, but because they increase our chances of getting published; and that we revise our papers not because we believe such changes are needed, but because we hope to appease reviewers and journal editors?” (74).

A “publish-or-perish mentality” produces stress and anxiety, and leads to publication gamesmanship such as “impact factor manipulation by journal editors and strategies of self-citation of authors” (76). There are practices of “cash for co-authorship” – where a European business school pays 6,000 Euros if you make one of their employees a co-author of your paper in a 3- or 4-star journal – or mutual co-authorship (“I’ll put you on my paper if you put me on your paper” – 80-81).

In chapter 6, Mats Alvesson (Lund University) and André Spicer (City University London) reconstruct how academics in business schools have progressively surrendered their autonomy and complied with the demands of managerialism, producing “increasingly uninteresting and irrelevant research” (13).

“There has been a movement from more pluralistic approaches to research (where a wide range of forms of research were seen as appropriate) to a myopic focus on publishing in highly ranked journals. The number of journal articles published by a researcher and the level of the journal in which they appear has moved from a modest issue to a major concern. For some it has become almost the only concern. Having something important, relevant and meaningful to say seems to have become comparatively less important than doing and publishing research that appears in the right journal” (95).

A few publications in highly-ranked journals may lead to professorships and some European business schools have been known to offer tens of thousands of Euros for the publication of articles in such journals! The ‘4 by 4’ formula – an overriding concern for many academics, apparently – refers to the publication of four journal articles in journals which are ranked as four-star by lists like the Association of Business Schools (ABS). While there is a myopic focus on academics publishing their research in highly-ranked journals, it is no contradiction that there has been a simultaneous rise of the “all administrative university” (Ginsberg) with many ‘deanlets’ and ‘deanlings’ (associate and assistant deans) doing all sorts of things that are not directly related to teaching or research.

In chapter 7, Mats Alvesson and Dan Kärreman argue that the key dynamic in business schools is increasingly a matter of various stakeholder at universities and business schools engaging in positional games. Reminding us of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, they write: “There is something rotten in higher education today” (112). When quantitative

concerns overtake qualitative concerns, quality inevitably will suffer. Chapter 7 discusses the increased focus on accreditation (with its many measurable key performance indicators) and the significant cost that comes with it:

- i. The financial cost of paying the accreditation institute and of doing the necessary work (e.g. producing the required documents);
- ii. The increased bureaucracy and standardization of operations required to satisfy the institute that the ‘right’ modes of operating are in place (this presumably reduces creativity and originality); and
- iii. The moral costs of faking when developing illusionary tricks so that everything looks good in the eyes of the accreditation committee” (122).

In chapter 8, Tony Huzzard and Allanah Johnston (Newcastle University, UK) explore the implications of employer branding in academia. In chapter 9, Consuelo Vasquez, Sophie Del Fa, Viviane Sergi and Benoit Cordelier (all from UQAM, Canada) explore the commodification of students (using the example of a failed advertising campaign at a North American university). Commodification does not stop with knowledge, teaching and academics, but is extended to students who are commodified in two ways: (1) they are branded and sold as ideal types, and, (2) as *prosumers* (consumers and producers at the same time), are put to work in the branding of universities.

In chapter 10, Peter Svensson and Jens Rennstam (both from Lund University) analyse the introduction of a new education programme (a Swedish vocationally-based business administration programme called *Civilekonomerna*) as an attempt at deprofessionalising business school academics by granting more influence over education to market forces.

In chapter 11, Ekaterina Chertkovskaja (who is a member of the editorial collective of *ephemera*) and Peter Watt (York St John University) critically examine the centrality of the idea of employability in UK universities. Like the authors of other chapters, Chertkovskaya and Watt not only critique their topic (by challenging the employability agenda of universities), but also provide practical recommendations as to how universities can change for the better. They write:

“[W]e do not want to end up in box-ticking, game-playing, cynicism or academic self-hatred..., with all these actions leading to complicity in reproducing the problematic trends in higher education. Instead, we suggest sticking to and acting upon our ideals and it is in relation to this that we have formulated this chapter” (183).

In chapter 12, Martin Parker (University of Leicester), drawing on his experience as an editor of the journal *Organization* (from 2008 to 2012), analyses the market for publishing journal articles, and considers the consequences of the ranking and monetisation of journals. Parker argues that this has negative consequences for all stakeholders, i.e. students,

academics, and taxpayers. Although there are many reasons to cheer the development of open-access journals, the publication process may not change fundamentally in Parker's view till the time where the critically important issue of the corporatization of the university has been addressed.

In chapter 13, Alan Irvin (Copenhagen Business School) argues that the 'two worlds' of 'academic excellence' and 'societal / business relevance' in business schools are not separate, but inextricably intertwined. Finally, in chapter 14, it is back to two of the co-editors, Mats Benner and Tony Huzzard, who conclude the volume. They argue against the nostalgia of the Humboldtian university ideal and suggest three ways forward: alternative takes on performance management systems, an expansion of the role of critique in business training, and, finally, a widening of the social and societal remit of business schools. The authors of this volume share the hope that Minerva can be "unified with reflexivity rather than with the market" (243).

From the above discussion, it can be gleaned that this is an excellent (in the true sense of the word!) collection of critical reflections of the corporatization of universities and in particular, business schools. The 22 authors are almost exclusively from reputable European and Canadian business schools. The well-informed introductory chapter makes

some references to Asian business schools, and of course the US business schools serve as a model for the marketized business school. It could have been useful to have some contributors from Asian universities and perhaps also from US universities to expand the diversity of viewpoints even further. While personally, I found the numerous vignettes and examples particularly from the UK and Sweden most interesting, the occasionally narrow geographical focus could be regarded as a relative weakness of a volume with numerous strengths.

All articles are very well-referenced and the bibliographical references show that the authors are very much on top of the current literature. The book also comes with a useful index, contributors' biodata, and unsurprisingly for a renowned publisher like Routledge, the book is professionally edited and well-produced.

I found the insights on journal publishing which are spread over various chapters most insightful, albeit somewhat depressing, and this very well-researched book has clarified to me why my editorial colleagues and I have started our humble JALT venture in the first place: an open (in many senses of the word) journal that challenges conventional wisdom and that provides a convivial platform for a multiplicity of approaches to higher education.

Copyright: © 2020 Jürgen Rudolph. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.