

**THE TRAINING OF FUTURE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE-SECTOR MANAGERS**  
**IN FRANCE AND THE UNITED KINGDOM**

In organising the meeting in Paris of about forty French and British participants to analyse the most typical features of the training of public and private-sector managers, the Franco-British Council was well aware of the great differences between the two countries in this area. We nevertheless decided to proceed with the study because we felt that consideration of the solutions in the two countries to similar problems might provide appropriate and useful comparisons.

The organisers of the meeting invited trainers, teachers, principals of secondary schools and *grandes écoles* and university administrators to hear comments on current training methods by consumers, including company directors and human resources managers, and also by independent observers such as sociologists and journalists. As expected, the contributions of all participants were made on the basis of their commitments and responsibilities.

The educational, corporate and social views of training differed and while it had been expected that the French and British approaches would not be the same, it became clear during the course of the discussions that they were probably as far removed from each other as it was possible to be within the European context.

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The presentations of the French and British systems were very different.

On the French side, the "fast track " was described. French *lycées* can already tell when their pupils are 14 which ones will enter higher education. They will have chosen German as their foreign language and will be good at maths. They will enjoy academic support within their families - who will probably have teaching backgrounds. Their teachers and families will point them in the direction of the "great" Parisian *lycées* where they will join the most academically advanced classes, in which competition is fierce but exhilarating, and will take their baccalaureat early. Their top grades in the baccalaureat will get them into a *prépa* (class preparing students for the entrance exams to the *grandes écoles*) or to the *Sciences-Po*. They will enter a *grande école* (studying business or engineering) or the ENA (*Ecole Nationale d'Administration*) . This selection process is further refined, as the speakers pointed out, by ranking which allows the best to enter the "*grands corps*" such as INSEE, the *Ponts et Chaussées*, *Mines*, *Conseil d'Etat*, *Inspection des finances*, *Cour des Comptes*. Extremely talented individuals may spend a few years in public service but business awaits them with open arms (and cushy jobs).

The French system, whose main features are government service and republican elitism and which in principle is very meritocratic and open to talent, was strongly criticised. Its rigidity and selection processes were accused of being elitist. Only a very small proportion of students (2,500 at most out of the 600,000 students taking the baccalaureat in a given year) get into the major *grandes écoles*. Wasn't this a way of reproducing the managing classes, based on families' desires to help their children get on in life? A number of speakers appeared to think that the French model was now less successful than it had been forty years ago in fulfilling its social function.

While the description of the French system concentrated on the top *lycées*, *prépas*, and *grandes écoles*, the British presentation focused on the public schools and Oxbridge. Social class, money and tradition remain the best way of entering the public schools which are selective (despite a significant increase in scholarships) but are not subject to the "tyranny" of specialisation (such as in mathematics in France today). They devote much of their time to sport, extra-curricular and social activities

Oxford and Cambridge are also highly selective but between them accept between 7,000 and 8,000 students a year (as compared with the 2,500 accepted by the *grandes écoles*). Here too "fast tracks" exist and the colleges, subjects studied and results class students in a vast range of subtle ways. The UK speakers offered little criticism of this system and generally limited themselves to demanding more democratic access to these two universities.

The main question raised by the British participants at the meeting was one of the connection - if there is one - between the objectives of higher education and better equipping individuals for senior management positions. Does the elite have any exposure to the reality and concerns of the business world? It was explained that many UK directors had received no form of higher education.

Degrees provide only one way into certain management positions in the UK while in France they are now of vital importance. The UK has long rejected the intellectualism that is apparently so characteristic of France and indeed a certain casualness or even eccentricity is considered better form than the burning ambition of "swots". But the time of the amateur now seems to have run its course and while a good degree from Oxbridge, in whatever subject, can still open many doors, professionalism is gaining in importance. Practical on-the-job training and business schools are becoming increasingly popular.

The reaction of the French participants to the semi-joking, semi-serious comments of their British counterparts was muted and they generally reserved their energy and criticism for their own system. As they themselves admitted, to describe the training received by their top people as "dehumanising" would be to caricature it but there were allusions to the disastrous performances in the private sector of leading civil servants whose only punishment was to return to their original jobs. Other participants expressed their concern that so many former students of the *grandes écoles* and former public servants with the leading government departments should be at the head of public bodies and companies, given that that they shared the same intellectual outlook and had the same reflexes.

Defence of the French approach to training came mainly from some of the British participants who praised an education system that develops great analytical and synthetic skills in those who receive it. This system gives French students an extremely wide education founded on a perfect grasp of their own language. The British speakers pointed out that this lowers the barriers between "intellectuals" and directors. Does the term "intellectual" have any meaning in the UK today? While all French men and women have at least a certain degree of "intellectual" ambition whether they be in business, administration, politics or academia, the British tend to leave intellectual activity to those whose job or preference it is. Consequently the dialogue suffered from a certain amount of purely internal debate, particularly on the part of the French. It was symptomatic that the French should see 'leadership' as synonymous with higher education and exceptions to this rule as isolated

examples. Autodidacts have more trouble making their way in business or the public sector than graduates in France.

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The passionate debate about existing models was proof that this was one of the most sensitive areas of the two cultures. However, by selecting and slightly exaggerating the features of well-known models one may well risk giving a rather reductive picture of the two societies.

After all, didn't the French discussion of the *grandes écoles* and the leading government institutions hide the fact that half of all French engineers come out of the university departments which are run somewhat along the lines of the *grandes écoles*. These latter, on the other hand, are now comprehensively diversifying and accepting many university graduates for supplementary fast track courses. Interpenetration is therefore far greater than would at first appear. Universities are setting up their own *grandes écoles* while the *grandes écoles* are opening their doors to university teaching. Although the *grandes écoles* were strongly criticised for their uniform admissions criteria, this criticism was fundamentally undermined by the clear convergence between the universities and the *grandes écoles*. The two types of higher education are becoming more similar, or even merging.

While a number of French speakers criticised their own system, others pointed out its merits: greater access to all social classes than might appear; the ability to stimulate talent; a selection process which though tough, is not significantly different from selection elsewhere; finally, the preparatory classes in *lycées* also give access to the less prestigious *grandes écoles* and this materially reduces the number of those who don't make the grade.

The disproportionate importance attached to mathematics in the selection process was played down. It is not long since the emphasis was on legal studies and it may now be the case that literature is making a major come-back.

The British played a rather minor role in this discussion and focused on 'A'-levels which were criticised for being too specialised. In the UK too it seems that change has come with the creation of new universities (the former polytechnics), some of which are excellent, and which may challenge the position of older universities including Oxford and Cambridge. In the meantime Oxbridge now draws students from the entire social spectrum. The British did not appear anxious to borrow many ideas from the French system. Both sides praised the sports facilities and importance given, particularly by public (independent) schools, to extra-curricular activities.

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Should the reform of management training be left in the hands of teachers? This was one of the key questions raised in the discussion. Contributions were made by several trainers and sociologists, yet it was agreed that training for the working life must be refocused on the needs of companies, the economy and public

administration. Great interest was shown in the opinion of the consumers - directors and human resources managers.

The description of the private sector, of the senior civil service and of the demands created by the globalisation of international exchange dominated the discussion of reforms. What did it bring up?

The private sector, given this background, now focuses on competitive margins, company reorganisation founded on innovation, the development of new intellectually-based jobs and the decompartmentalising and internationalisation of production. The upheaval being experienced by the sector means that rigid structures are giving way to more flexible systems that are able to forecast market requirements. No area of the economy is unaffected by this vast wave of restructuring. In order to meet the demands of international investors in particular, the workings of boards of directors at the head of corporations, once clothed in secrecy, must now become more transparent and efficient.

Work itself is changing. Careers have lost their stately sense of progress. Managers have acquired more freedom and responsibility but are now also more exposed to risk. They must manage their human resources better, collaborate more, work more as teams and realise that their authority and power will only last so long as those who work with them accept them and acknowledge their legitimacy.

The public sector is subject to comparable pressure and has not been untouched by these developments. It is increasingly exposed to market pressures and a number of public bodies (particularly local councils) have already opted to become more market oriented. We can therefore look forward to a situation where managers move between the public and private sectors throughout their careers. One can discern in the new functions of governments in the fight against social exclusion, illiteracy, crime and sickness a tendency towards a global approach.

Finally, as the British participants were the first to point out, the progress being made in Europe, the single currency, the enlargement and particularly the globalisation of the economy and the internationalisation of exchanges are going to require more mobility and flexibility from managers. Furthermore many speakers stated that when seeking to fill positions, their human resources managers are increasingly requiring applicants to have MBAs.

All were agreed that neither France nor the UK are doing as well as our American, Japanese and German competitors in this area.

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In what everyone agreed was a world in upheaval, are the old training methods always the most appropriate? If not, what should be done? At this point in the discussions all concerned were generally agreed on the need to sketch out the broad outlines of reforms that were not only desirable but possible in the light of national characteristics.

As the general cultural differences between the French and British led us to expect, the discussions looked at the gap that might be created between an 'elite' that is strongly attached to 'unprofitable' academic duties and

managers who are basically selected and judged on the basis of their management performance. In fact the various contributions to this debate corrected what might be seen as an over-rigid distinction between the beautifying and enrichment of the soul and the professionalism required of managers. No clear line can be drawn between these two forms of knowledge. No-one questioned the fact that the aim of academia (in the widest sense of the word) is to carry out disinterested research while also teaching and training.

Quite on the contrary, all wished that management training could leave more time for research, both as a means of intellectual training and also because it strengthens the necessary links between theory and practice. It was regretted that the teaching of a number of science subjects (such as physics) is too closely linked to mathematics, so that abstract reasoning is over-emphasised in the selection process. It was suggested that practical experience should play a larger part than at present both in selection and in management science studies.

Professionalism should not be the enemy of general culture. In a world as global as ours, is it possible to ignore the role of art in everyday life? This has been understood by those companies who have increased their artistic patronage in order to project a more human image of themselves.

A number of participants went so far as to suggest that leaders needed not only strong academic intelligence but also 'emotional intelligence'. The time now appears to be over when qualifications, degrees and knowledge formed the basis for authority and exempted managers from communication. Companies can only be strong and progress if employees are united in their attempt to understand all the activities of that company.

Transcending the gap between pure cultural enrichment and professional training that is in line with market needs, the discussion revealed the basic unity which is a condition of success. Training managers does not mean preventing them from having an interest in literature, the fine arts or pure research - far from it.

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As all participants acknowledged, meeting the challenges posed by globalisation and international business requires an effort in the area of youth exchanges and language learning.

Delegates agreed that the education of every future manager should include a period of study and training in one or more foreign countries. This is already a part of the curriculum in business schools in particular but should become a general trend and should include experience of life outside Europe. The resulting international view which globalisation demands will encourage careers which include several long periods spent abroad.

Languages are needed for the mobility unanimously agreed to be necessary and the general consensus was that all students should be able to speak two European languages in addition to their mother-tongue. The time will come when some teaching will be given in a foreign language, even in the *grandes écoles*.

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If managers are to be able to deal with change and mobility requirements, they will have to become involved in continuous training throughout their careers. On this point there was absolutely no disagreement: initial training

is the key that will allow managers to acquire further knowledge throughout their working lives by means of continuous training. No matter how outstanding the student, the knowledge acquired by age 25 is not enough to last a career spanning 35 years or to meet the challenges posed by new technologies, life styles and scientific developments. Continuous training now forms a major part of management training. Either on their own or in partnerships, schools and universities should move towards offering the best form of response to the requirements of the public and private sectors. A number of companies and ministries already organise their own training programmes; of course it might be said that this has always been the case, although now it is not always a question of learning on the job but of going back to university. Continuous training also makes it possible to upgrade skills and offers new opportunities.

Representatives of the teaching profession put great emphasis on the need for 'lifelong learning'.

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There was general approval of the British university tutorial system, as used particularly in Oxford and Cambridge, which, it was considered, would add value to the French system. Of course there is contact between teachers and pupils in the French education system as well but the introduction of the tutorial system, including older pupils too as tutors, would help spread this practice. Tutors are able to guide and advise pupils, particularly about choices in life. Tutorials should enable students to ask the right questions, which is as important as finding the answers to them.

It was rather in this vein that the meeting hoped to stimulate what has been called 'the entrepreneurial spirit'. Future managers should be trained to enjoy challenges, to innovate and to take risks. Managers should not think of their jobs as sinecures but as a means to move both their companies and themselves forward.

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The meeting wished to avoid debate over selection : average levels of competence should be within the grasp of all but this should not deny excellence to the few. Clearly selection is inevitable and even necessary. But it must be fair. Criticism was levelled at selection procedures which gave too much emphasis to mathematics though it was pointed out that the subject was important and that much of the work done in business schools is based on maths, while the heavy focus on accountancy in the UK also came in for criticism.

There was additional criticism of selection at too young an age and of over-bureaucratic, impersonal selection. Despite the excellent results they produce, competitive exams were seen as too restrictive and badly adapted to offering equal opportunities to foreign students and young people from poorer social backgrounds.

The participants decided that examinations and competitions should be supplemented by interviews and assessments after a few months of actual work. Performance assessment should be applied throughout managers' careers.

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The question of the funding of training could not be ignored. At the insistence of the British participants, and without any objection by the French participants, it was noted that spending on higher education could not continue at current levels. This was especially so in view of the fact that the recipients of higher education

benefit so significantly from it financially. Is it therefore acceptable that society should continue to bear the burden of costs generated by a minority of the population? The picture in this area varies widely between trainee public sector employees who are paid to study, to students at private schools, particularly business schools, where fees are extremely high.

As a number of speakers said, there is already a trend for at least some of the cost of training to be borne either by the students themselves or by the company that wishes to employ them. This system already exists in the area of lifelong training. The various types of co-operation in this sphere between the universities and the *grandes écoles* are increasing and were considered to be extremely positive.

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The discussion highlighted the major differences between the two training systems, which are separated by radically different approaches rooted in the history and sociological attitudes of the two countries.

However, these differences do not prevent a comparative analysis of the challenges posed by the modern world or a search for answers that, while not being the same, are at least similar. At the end of the discussions, the two joint presidents, Mr Roger Fauroux and Lord Dahrendorf drew a number of conclusions and recommendations which were unanimously approved.

Jean-Marie Le Breton

26 May 1998

## **THE CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TWO JOINT CHAIRMEN**

At the conclusion of its work, the discussion of the training of future public and private-sector managers in France and the UK organised by the Franco-British Council under the joint presidency of Mr Roger Fauroux and Lord Dahrendorf arrived a number of conclusions and recommendations as follows:

1. It was unanimously agreed that there has been fundamental change in both countries which, despite considerable differences, often takes a quite similar form
2. The days have now gone when initial training was all its recipients needed to organise their careers and live off what they had learned during the course of their studies. The meeting insisted on the need for lifelong training whose full merits should now be recognised. Only managers who are involved in lifelong training will be able to justify their authority within companies or the public sector so that initial training must now be viewed as the access route into new knowledge that managers will have to acquire through lifelong training
3. The discussions focused on selection procedures, which at present remain unavoidable obstacles. While access to training by as many people as is possible is a democratic right, the quality of teaching is of equal importance. Candidates' age and selection procedures need to be examined further. The meeting hoped that the assessment of examinations and competitions would take into account other factors that contribute to the personality of future managers. It was pointed out that the values on which the public service and business are based are different, even though both areas must demonstrate professionalism.
4. Having highlighted the essential differences between the two systems of training, particularly in the areas of selection and teaching methods, the participants in the discussion did nonetheless underline the fact that universities and *grandes écoles* have grown closer together in France as have the older and the new universities in the UK.
5. The meeting agreed that more should be done to produce an educational model based on fairness and efficiency.
6. The meeting agreed that the answer to the challenges posed by Europe and globalisation lay in greater openness, not in a closing of ranks. Particular importance was placed on student exchange programmes which would allow more students to benefit from foreign experience both within and outside Europe. Within this context, the meeting strongly recommended that European students should all have a command of several European languages.
7. On the more specific matter of teaching methods, the participants in the discussion underlined the lesson the French authorities might draw from the introduction of a British-style tutorial system.
8. It was also recommended that there should be greater liaison between research and management training. The participants believed that personal or team research should be included in training programmes as research improves judgement skills and is character-forming. Particular emphasis was placed on teamwork as a preparation for professional life.

9. The meeting was similarly unanimous in highlighting the importance of opening up the *grandes écoles* and universities to business. It was acknowledged that a significant step has already been made in this direction but that more progress must be made down this path. Many speakers pointed out that managing a government department or a company is not (or is no longer) a solitary job: team work must take the form of internal and external communication. Authority is only justified if it is accepted following explanation to and discussion with all concerned. Leadership needs more than professionalism.
10. Financial questions were not ignored. Many participants pointed out that the time is coming when the rising cost of funding (secondary and higher) education will create an increasing number of problems. In the UK there is a strong lobby in favour of reducing education spending and if this is the case, the question of the role those involved (companies, government, pupils and students) will have to play in the funding of their own studies and in continuous training must be raised. Many participants considered that this is a question worth raising and that undogmatic solutions to it must be found.

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Background papers available on request:

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Insert: The meeting agreed that the fast pace of technological change and the changing demands of skills to ensure employment required governments to develop strategies for continual professional development and lifelong learning. The group noted that access to advice, guidance and counselling were central to the development of lifelong learning strategies and that the skills that underlie these services were important in developing learning organisations and to supporting the development of individuals. *Sue Slipman*

British participants signalled reservations about a system which effectively made final selections at too early a stage, preventing late developers from joining the race. - Rob Hull

[New point]: The meeting called upon Governments and organisations: to support standards and qualifications development for advice, guidance and counselling professionals and for business and other leaders for whom staff development is a central part of the leadership task. Further the group believed that employers should develop strategies to introduce this set of ethical practices across all employment sectors *Sue Slipman*