

# **Management, Modernity and Nation-Building: The Contested Histories of Management Education in India**

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## 1.

The United States has been at the forefront of globalization of research and education in the field of Management.<sup>1</sup> US business schools and philanthropic foundations, most notably the Ford Foundation, have led the institutionalisation of management research and education institutions across the globe. In the global histories of Management, there has been a long-standing interest in interrogating US influence on management theory, curricula, pedagogy, and practices of knowledge production. Commonly understood as Americanization, these global histories of management have mapped the diverse and particular historical trajectories of the field in various parts of the globe, most notably western Europe, the Mediterranean, Brazil, and India. (See, for example: contributions to a symposium issue of *Journal of Management Inquiry*, led by Üsdiken 2004; also see Gemelli 1998, Srinivas 2008, among others.)

As part of mapping the influence of American business schools on Management research and education, the extant scholarship on Americanization has also drawn attention to the wider political and economic history to make sense of American interest in promoting Management across the globe (see Gemelli 1998, for a discussion on Europe). In Europe, for example, the early interventions to establish Management, post-World War II, were driven by the need to counter the impending threat of communism and to rebuild democracies, as well as developing the social sciences more widely across the region (Sutton 1998), as part of European reconstruction. Still others have focused on the role of US philanthropic foundations on the rise of the American ‘soft power’ from an international relations perspective (Parmar 2012).

The scholarship points to the differences in conditions and outcomes of such interventions led by US philanthropic foundations and its business schools in

different parts of Europe in comparison to the US (see Gemelli 1998; Tiratsoo 1998, 2004). This has been characterized as a hybrid form of management within the UK (Tiratsoo and Tomlinson 1998) and also in Mediterranean Europe (Kipping, Üsdiken & Puig 2004). Elsewhere, Kieser (2004) downplays the importance of US institutions involved in Americanization of Management in Germany, and argues that it was a result of the “ideologization of German management sciences in the Third Reich, that their research should be as neutral and objective—as scientific—as possible” (Kieser 2004, 94). Therefore, the existing scholarship on Americanization of Management research and education has focused on regional/national differences, in comparison to the US, but also on the prior historical state of the social sciences in these countries, on which Management was based. It has also pointed to the role of American foreign policy and the wider geo-politics of post-World War II Europe in shaping the practices of Americanization of Management.

## 2.

Similar such work in India on Americanization of Management, as an episteme and field of instruction, has been sparse. Management was institutionalized in the country with financial support from the Ford Foundation and academic support from the Harvard Business School and MIT's Sloan School (Hill, Haynes and Baumgartel 1973). The first two management institutes in the country were established in Calcutta and Ahmedabad in 1961, and founded through a partnership between private capital, philanthropy, support from the central and state governments, and US B-Schools. During the early years, Indian faculty members were sent to the US for training while faculty members from HBS and MIT Sloan visited India for curricular development (Srinivas 2008).

As a result, Management research in India was based in deductive reasoning and positivism, the dominance of research methods common with the physical sciences, and most significantly, case-based teaching methods. This has been characterized as ‘mimicry’ of the US Management knowledge and education by the Indian institutes (Srinivas, 2008). Hagiographic accounts aside (see Ram Mohan, 2011, who has written an institutional history of IIM, Ahmedabad), others have termed Management in the country as “transplantation” of theory, issues,

concepts, curricula, pedagogy, and ideology (D'Mello, 1999); or unresponsive to the “real” needs of the Indian economy, its large public sector, agriculture and unorganized manufacturing sector etc. (Rajagopalan, 1992).

The dominance of the US in Indian Management education and research, however, was not without challenge. Srinivas (2008) has termed such efforts as “revivalism,” which attempted to draw on Indian traditions, values, and cultural ethos to make Management more Indian. Less sparing in his assessment, D'Mello (1999) calls such revivalism as “Bhartiya Management Studies,” which appeal to the 3,000 year-old Indian tradition as the fount of ancient wisdom and contemporary culture from which Indian organizations and management practitioners ought to learn. Critical of the patriarchal, Brahminical, Hindu past as a potential source of wisdom, D'Mello (1999) suggests such revivalism is best avoided.

Departing from such epistemological histories of Management in India, I am interested in tracing the diverse imaginaries on which Management was founded in the country. Following Smith (2009, 462), I understand “imaginaries” as “a particular, often complex view of the world that comes to shape agenda, research trajectories, projects, and policies.” Imaginaries are, Smith argues, “normatively loaded visions not only of what should be done ‘in the world’ but also how it should be undertaken and why.” It refers, therefore, to ideologies, social factors, and practices, and is made up of scientific, technological, economic, political, and cultural imperatives.

Given the multiplicity of institutional actors involved in the founding of Management in India, it is somewhat expected that the founding and maturity of Management in the country was premised on a range of imaginaries, which were, occasionally, in conflict with each other. In this research, I am particularly interested in re-covering the nationalist or nation-building imaginary of Management in India. For example, the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA) posits itself as the outcome of an innovative experiment undertaken in post-colonial India with the objective of building “a fledgling independent nation into a model democratic state committed to growth with

equity in the development of its people.”<sup>2</sup> The nation has also been central to the criticisms levelled at Management in the country. While Rajagopalan (1992) makes reference to the failures of Management to respond to the unique needs of the *national* economy; Srinivas (2008, 2012) has focused on the search for an *authentic Indian* management – that is, culturally and drawing on Indian knowledge systems and ethos.

Departing from the received histories of Americanization through Management, as if imposed from the outside-in, in this research I am interested in reclaiming the autonomous nationalist imaginary involved in the coming of Management to India, as not simply imposed on ‘Third World’ nations such as India, but as desired, even if so by the Indian national elite. This research proposes to complete a detailed map of the diverse and competing imaginaries that underpinned Management in India.

Given the contestation over the conception, functioning, and role of the IIMs in the country (see Hill, Haynes and Baumgartel 1973, for an outline), the focus of my research was the first three decades of their functioning (1960-1990). This concentration on the years 1960-1990 is considered. First, the association between the Ford Foundation, Harvard Business School (HBS), Sloan School of Management (SSM), and the Indian Institutes of Management at Ahmedabad and Calcutta (IIMA and IIMC respectively) were active in some form or other during this period, which helps trace the ways in which the imaginaries played themselves out. Secondly, owing to the neoliberalisation of the Indian economy, starting from 1991, the nature of the Indian economy changed structurally. As a result, the role of Management in the country was also re-orientated towards private capital and industry, more significantly than earlier. As part of this, I consulted the archival records pertaining to the Ford Foundation’s (FF) grants towards establishing and institutionalising Management in India, which were housed at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) in New York. I spent two weeks at the RAC consulting the archival material. In order to understand the pre-history of FF’s involvement in India, archival material relating to key grants made in the 1950s were also consulted. In addition to the grant files relating to grants to IIMA and IIMC, the Ford Foundation had also supported other management institutions in the country before or during this period, whose files were also

consulted; along with related correspondence, oral histories, FF's India Office files, etc.

### 3.

In August 1951, then-FF President Paul Hoffman visited India to identify areas of technical assistance to the country, when he was invited by the Indian Prime Minister Nehru to establish FF's India Office. A memorandum of agreement was signed between the Government of India and the Ford Foundation in January 1952 which formalised support between the FF and India, with a focus on community-based rural development and agricultural extension and for the construction of a Gandhi Memorial Community Centre.<sup>3</sup> Building on these early interventions, the Ford Foundation began to provide significant grants for the purpose of establishing research and training institutions on Management in the country, the earliest of which was made in 1954. However, crucial here is the role that Management was expected to play in India's national development.

Reflecting on the developmental challenge before India, Douglas Ensminger, FF's Representative in India, argued that:

the process of transforming India from a traditional to a dynamic, communicative society – where problem-solving is in keeping with the findings of science and technology rather than handed down from generation to generation – must become a central theme in future national thinking, planning and action.<sup>4</sup>

Management was imagined to be central to the development of this transformation of the country, through the use of scientific problem-solving. FF's contribution was to “help India locate, augment, and bring to bear her own managerial resources on her managerial problems.” Management, then, was seen as crucial to solving the problems that afflicted India and impeded its development.

The Ford Foundation was actively involved in the founding and development of the Indian Institutes of Management at Calcutta and Ahmedabad. While correspondence regarding the founding of the Institutes had begun in the 1950s,

the FF provided support to the Institutes from 1960s onwards. I have accessed material relating to FF's support from 1960s through to 1980s. During this period, the Ford Foundation supported not only the institutional building needs, but also facilitated the exchange of faculty between India and the US. Faculty from HBS and MIT Sloan in the US came to India to teach, train, research, and help develop cases. On the other hand, faculty from India were selected to undergo research and teaching training in the US. Notwithstanding the unequal relationship (that is, Indians in need of training and US faculty as trainers) in the early years, there was emphasis on curricular and pedagogic development, including the development and use of cases to teach within the classroom. The US faculty members also played a crucial role in the administration of the institutes in Ahmedabad and Calcutta.

However, as Indians began to take control of the institutions, support from the Ford Foundation continued in the form of research and training. The FF was involved in initiating and supporting research on a range of areas and topics, such as healthcare, education, and natural resources. Each of these was deemed to be crucial to the development of India as a modern nation. Thus, unlike Management which is typically conceived to be in service of private capitalism, Management *in India* was seen as crucial to the organization of the public sector, as well as other realms of the Indian economy.

The Ford Foundation was also involved in supporting other institutions of Management in the country. In 1958, it provided funding to the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI). This included support for establishing a research division, which was expected to develop an industry-wide approach through consultancy, including in industries such as steel, mining and heavy engineering which were all seen as crucial to India's nation-building. The FF also tried to develop the case-method over the use of the syndicate workshop method that had been common at ASCI in the earlier years.

From 1961 onwards, the Ford Foundation also provided grant funding to the All India Management Association with the objective of organizing and institutionalizing Management in the country by creating associations of management with regional and city-level chapters. The Association was expected

to bring Management into the public mainstream by building collaborations and exchanges between the state, industry, managers, and academia.

In the 1980s, the FF allocated funds to the Indian Institute of Management at Bangalore, which had been instituted with the objective of bolstering the Management needs of the public sector in the country. Relatedly in the 1980s, the Ford Foundation also provided grant money to the Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA) which had been founded with the objective of professionalising the rural sector in the country. Thus, FF's involvement in India was not restricted to industry (private or public) but also the agriculture and dairy sectors in the rural areas of the country.

In addition to the grant-related documents pertaining to the above institutions, I also consulted files relevant to the key personnel involved in the Ford Foundation's programme in India. For example, Douglas Ensminger's *Self-Study Report* and his oral history transcription are a crucial source of information to map the imaginaries that undergird FF's involvement in institutionalization of Management in the country. Likewise, other Ford Foundation personnel such as Kamala Chowdhry and Francis X. Sutton had also played crucial roles in supporting the globalization of Management in India and globally, whose reports and correspondence I was able to access at RAC. Still others, mainly US academics and consultants appointed by FF, have written assessments or travel reports. Again, these are useful sources of information with regard to the status, direction, and potential of Ford Foundation intervention relating to Management in the country.

#### 4.

Overall, my research visit to RAC had been most useful, affording me the opportunity to gather relevant archival material for my research project. For the future, I would also like to look for further archival material, particularly that which relates to the Indian 'voice' in the archives, which will help map the other imaginaries behind the coming of Management in the country. Some of these can be recovered from the reports and correspondence exchanged with FF personnel, thus, making the research polyphonic, which is crucial for this research project.



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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Management' is used here consistently, except when referring to the US, where the term Business Administration/Studies is used more commonly.

<sup>2</sup> About IIMA; <http://www.iimahd.ernet.in/institute/about.html> (retrieved December 19, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Grant made to the Government of India in 1951 for establishing a Gandhi Memorial Community Centre in New Delhi (05200060) and, in 1952, assistance for establishing extension training centres and rural village development areas (05200061); FF Records (Grants E-G), 1936-2005, FA732C, RAC.

<sup>4</sup> Ensminger, Douglas. *The Ford Foundation Overseas Development: Self Study of the India Program*, 1966, Report 002348, Box 98, FF Records (Catalogued Reports), FA739A, RAC.