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Management Learning

Reclaiming the Humanities in Management Learning: A Non-Instrumental Approach to Empathy and Self-Liberation

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RECLAIMING THE HUMANITIES IN MANAGEMENT LEARNING: A NON-INSTRUMENTAL APPROACH TO EMPATHY AND SELF-LIBERATION

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a three-year pedagogical experiment exploring the integration of humanities into management education at a UK business school. Seeking to de-instrumentalize management learning, the experiment focused on teaching the humanities intrinsically, as valuable in themselves rather than as tools for re-producing economically “useful” management knowledge. The research investigates the lived experiences of students who participated in the module, drawing on interviews, reflective essays, and correspondence. Our analysis reveals four key phenomenological modes of being and becoming management learners via the humanities: defamiliarization, intersubjectivity, abductive action, and self-liberation. Our findings surprised us. Expecting to instill ethical awareness and enhance students’ empathy for others, we discovered a more nuanced mode of learning, in which students explored their own emotions and sense of self. We explain this unexpected outcome and contribute to theory in management learning by reconsidering the work of Robert Coles on moral imagination alongside recent debates on the nature of empathy. We argue for a shift in our theoretical understanding of why the humanities belong in management learning. Rather than “using” the humanities to make managers more ethical or empathetic, the humanities are most “useful” when they allow students to learn about themselves in ways that inculcate their innate empathic capabilities. We further reflect, however, on the challenges of integrating such a non-instrumentalist approach in an institutional context that prioritizes the acquisition of management knowledge over the experience of management learning.

KEYWORDS

management humanities, intersubjectivity, abductive reasoning, self-liberation, phenomenology

INTRODUCTION: THE ART OF MANAGEMENT?

If management is at least as much an art as a science, then the arts and humanities have a place in management education. Persistent calls for integrating the humanities into management education have been made over the past two decades (Bobko and Tejada, 2000; Chew and McInnis-Bowers, 2004; O'Connor, 2011; Nesteruk, 2012; Tung, 2006). In some ways these calls for humanities-based approaches echo mid-twentieth-century discussions of management as a creative and experimental form of work, as much an exercise in intuition and emotions as in calculation and deductive reasoning (Urwick, 1943; Urwick and Brech, 1946). Yet by the late twentieth century, management education increasingly aligned with the logic and rigor of the natural sciences. The legitimacy of the business school came to be

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2
3 rooted in its capacity to inculcate decisiveness and certainty in future managers (Khurana,
4
5 2007). As one business school dean retorted when asked to consider introducing humanities
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7 courses to business students, they “didn’t come here to read novels” (Michaelson, 2016: 589).
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10 Yet twenty-first century business schools have increasingly sought to “re-purpose”
11
12 themselves as promoters of the public good, developing approaches to management learning
13
14 that equip students to confront the socioecological grand challenges of our time (Colombo, et
15
16 al., 2024; Kitchener, 2024; Kitchener and Delbridge, 2020). This re-purposing of the business
17
18 school has opened new opportunities to ask management students to read novels, watch films,
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20 and view or make art. When the “Carnegie II” report appeared in the wake of the global
21
22 financial crisis of 2008-2009 (Colby, et al., 2011), its calls for more humanities in
23
24 management curricula resonated widely with educators dissatisfied with the status quo.
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26 Proponents of integrating history, literature and art into management education insisted that
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28 doing so would promote empathic capacity, ethical sensitivity, and sensemaking capabilities
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30 in management students and professionals (Coleman, 2012; Madden and Smith, 2015;
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32 March, 2006; Michaelson, 2016; Spee and Fraiberg, 2015; Starkey and Tempest, 2025). Yet
33
34 the persistence of such calls, spanning multiple decades, hints at the challenges involved. The
35
36 re-integration of the liberal arts into management education is a significant, substantive, and
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38 ongoing phenomenon (Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux, 1994; Gagliardi and
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40 Czarniawska-Joerges, 2006; Morris, et al., 2005; Spee and Fraiberg, 2015; Starkey, et al.,
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42 2019; Steyaert, et al., 2016; Sullivan, et al., 2016). It remains, however, very far from
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44 mainstream management pedagogic practice.
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51 Our research addresses the challenges of integrating the humanities into management
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53 learning. We report on evidence gathered from our own experiences doing so in a UK
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55 business school. Rather than position the humanities as tools for producing better managers,
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57 we framed our approach as teaching the humanities on their own terms, as intrinsically rather
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3 than instrumentally valuable (Allen, 1995). Our approach was framed by awareness of
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5 existing pedagogies founded not on a “business case” for humanities in management
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7 learning, but on the conviction that arts and literature provide distinctive, immersive
8
9 educational experiences for management learners (Johnsen, et al., 2021; Thanem and
10
11 Wallenberg, 2021).
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15 The results of our experiment provide strong evidence that humanities pedagogy can
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17 be a generative and liberating element of a management education. We were nonetheless
18
19 surprised to discover—after significant reflection—that it may also be impossible to do so. In
20
21 a world in which “management learning” and “management knowledge” are often understood
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23 as interchangeable concepts, a humanities-based pedagogy that prepares students to *be*
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25 *managers* rather than to *know management* sits uncomfortably in an institutional void
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27 (Landfester and Metelmann, 2020b). Most existing approaches to management humanities
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29 insist that literature and art will provide future managers with greater capacity for empathy
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31 and sensemaking. The theoretical basis for humanities pedagogy is thus ironically framed by
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33 an instrumentalist logic, in which literature and art are understood as “useful” if they instill
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35 valuable managerial knowledge of how to be ethical. The results of our research, however,
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37 lead us to theorize that management humanities may be most useful when it generates self-
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39 referential learning rather than specific knowledge, and that some renderings of ethical
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41 management learning are rooted in a misunderstanding of the nature and development of
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43 empathy.
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50 As we explore in detail below, our students’ experiences partly align with existing
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52 theories of how humanities education can challenge the calculative logic of an economics-
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54 driven worldview. Their experiences included *defamiliarization* to heighten perception;
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56 *intersubjectivity* as an expansion of their personal outlook; *abductive action* as a pragmatic
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58 response to uncertainty; and *self-liberation* as a path to personal and professional
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development. Rather than being reprogrammed as newly ethical individuals, however, our students felt enabled to explore their own place in a more personally meaningful cultural and economic landscape. These findings urge us to reconsider the theoretical basis for the necessity of humanities education in management learning. We argue that teaching the humanities on their own terms, rather than as instrumentally “useful,” promotes management learning *experiences*, as opposed to knowledge acquisition. Management learning, in this approach, becomes a “way of being” that equips graduates to confront, on their own terms, the “permanent whitewater” of the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment of the business world (Vaill, 1996). Management humanities, we further demonstrate, may be most “useful” when it allows students to subjectively rediscover themselves, not “management.”

In making this step towards reclaiming non-instrumentality within management learning, we call for a fundamental reconsideration of the pioneering work of child psychologist Robert Coles (1989). Coles’ influential insights on the nature of empathy and ethics in relation to humanities learning have, we suggest, been misinterpreted and misapplied due to the institutional challenges confronting contemporary business schools. We argue that a reframing of what we mean by “empathy” in relation to management education can be helpful in overcoming this misunderstanding. The institutional logics of contemporary business schools make it tempting to argue that the act of reading “high” literature instills ethical sensibility in the reader, with reading serving as an exercise that develops “moral muscle” for future managers (Brokerhof, et al., 2023). By contrast, the Colesian approach that we find more convincing, as confirmed by psychological research and literary scholarship, theorizes empathy as a personal and embodied affect, with ethical behavior towards others resulting not from the content of humanities knowledge but from individual experiences that heighten moral imagination. Our findings provide substantial empirical

evidence supporting this more nuanced understanding of the relationship between management humanities and ethical development. We conclude, however, by reflecting on the substantial challenges of integrating this non-instrumentalist approach to management humanities into an institutional context that prioritizes management knowledge acquisition over experiential management learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Art, novels, poetry, and films have been used to teach in a wide variety of business and management subfields. This includes entrepreneurship (Durand and Henseler, 2023), human resource management and labor relations (Billsberry and Gilbert, 2008; Levy, 2007; Taylor and Provitera, 2011), organizational behavior (Bumpus, 2005; Champoux, 1999; Colakoglu and Littlefield, 2011; Comer and Holbrook, Jr., 2012; Holbrook, 2009; Smith, 2009), and strategy (Chia and Holt, 2009; Short and Ketchen, 2005; Westerman and Westerman, 2009). Leadership education has developed a particularly rich portfolio of humanities-based methods, seeking to inculcate qualities such as creativity, capacity for promoting organizational well-being, and non-linear perception of complex situations. Leadership educators have explored a broad realm of the humanities, including the visual arts (Cowan, 2007; Taylor and Ladkin, 2009; Tung, 2006), dramatic arts (Huffaker and West, 2005; Whitney and Packer, 2000), and canonical as well as experimental literature (Badaracco, Jr., 2006; Corrigan, 1999; Martin, et al., 2018; Śliwa, et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, many efforts to integrate the humanities into management education have tended to “use” the humanities to teach management concepts. Drama and visual art are used to teach transformational leadership; graphic novels illustrate team dynamics; films show concepts in change management; fiction promotes ethical business. The reigning approach to management humanities education is thus paradoxically instrumentalist in

approach, seeking to make a “business case” for literature and art to meet the perceived demands of university administrators and students-as-consumers. This is one consequence of the fact that, as Statler and Guillet de Monthoux (2015) observe, since the 1950s business schools have deferred to an epistemological paradigm rooted in logical empiricism, rational choice, and agency theory. These epistemological frameworks allow little to no space for consideration of aesthetics and ethics as experiences of, or within, business, management, or organization that have broader and deeper connections to wider human experiences, and the human condition itself (Ferraro, et al., 2005; McCloskey, 2021). Thus, alongside the mainstream instrumental “business case,” some practitioners in management humanities have developed subversive engagements with art and literature, founded on experiential rather than instrumental premises (Johnsen, et al. 2021).

Instrumentalist deference to mainstream management epistemology has significant consequences. Even consideration of interpretive and qualitative aspects of experience constructs these analytically as dimensions processed through coding, with morality, ethics and aesthetics approached in much the same way as cognition. When metaphors are used, as they inevitably must be even in economics (McCloskey, 1998; Morgan, et al., 2010) they tend to be increasingly specified and defined non-relationally. Morality, for example, has been broken down into moral complexity (Edgar and Pattison, 2011), moral mazes (Jackall, 1988), moral awareness (Butterfield, et al., 2000), moral character (Sennett, 1998), and most recently moral muscle (Brokerhof, et al., 2023). In each version, morality becomes functionalist, pursued for the sake of improved business and management outcomes.

The teaching of literature and art in humanities departments, however, is not pursued instrumentally. Although the development of moral awareness, character, or muscle may be a welcome outcome for humanities students, this is not the primary explicit or even implicit aim. Instead, the goal is to “delve deeply into language, art, artifact, culture, and nature” for

its own sake; there is, in the words of Stover (2018) “no case for the humanities” as useful disciplines. Etymologically and in their disciplinary development over time, the humanities have centered on the meanings and values, attitudes and beliefs that characterize human experience. Disciplines such as art, history, literature, music, philosophy, and religion do not offer nomothetic “answers” to human behavior; instead, they raise questions and invite multiple, subjective interpretations, emotions, and ways of being in the world (Arenas, 2006; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2021). If, in their non-instrumentality, the humanities offer a profound and perhaps necessary challenge to the epistemological assumptions of the modern business and management school, is it even possible to teach the humanities non-instrumentally in such a context?

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT: A PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIMENT

In what follows, we relate the results of a three-year pedagogical experiment, in which we invited students at the [university name and department redacted for review] to read literature as literature, to recite poetry for its rhythms not its rules for organizational success, and to view art not as illustration but as art.

In autumn 2017, the [university name and department redacted for review] was undergoing reorganization under the leadership of a new dean. Part of that reorganization included development of a research theme in Management Humanities, as well as another in Equality, Justice, and Ethics; both were expected to help re-purpose the management school’s research and teaching towards promoting the public good. The authors began designing a humanities-based undergraduate module as a pedagogical experiment in line with these research themes.

Core to the module was its overall aim of allowing students to explore “more than an exclusively materialist economic view of the world.” A set of learning outcomes were

developed to implement the approach, and were intentionally modelled on existing art history and English literature classes at [university name and department redacted for review].

The module was first offered in the academic year 2018-2019. As an optional elective in the final year of the undergraduate degree programme, it competed with a range of traditional business school offerings (e.g., human resources, marketing, strategy), in addition to modules pursuing critical perspectives rooted in history, sociology, and science and technology studies. The first cohort was consequently small, with just nine students enrolled, out of approximately 95 students eligible to do so.

The module was designed to emphasize independent experiential learning. We informed students there were no “wrong answers” to any questions and that playfulness, irony, and humor were especially welcome (Bigo and Islam, 2021; O’Doherty, 2020; Saggurthi and Thakur, 2015). Furthermore, we sought to subvert student expectations of what a teacher’s role should be in a business school classroom (Huber and Knights, 2021). Following Burt’s (2019) suggestions, students were urged not to accept anyone else’s reasons—especially their instructors’—for reading poetry, and were always presented with a wide range of options from which to choose their “assigned” reading. Students were also encouraged to read poems aloud, feeling the meter and speaking the enjambment. When discussing novels and visual art, silence—including awkward, prolonged silence—was afforded as a generative possibility rather than avoided out of fear that nobody had anything to say. Finally, instructors made clear that there were limits to their own expertise—that anything that could be said about a painting, poem, or novel could be said by any participant in the class with equal validity. The instructors sought to use their own training in humanities subjects not as a means of telling students what they should know, as one might experience in an introductory literature lecture, but as a means of guiding students into unfamiliar territory, acting as translators. In short, the module was proposed as an experiment and taught as an

adventure, although initially our goal was purely pedagogical and not to develop a research project.

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF BUSINESS HUMANITIES: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Business Humanities module was designed on the premise that engaging with the humanities, particularly literature and visual art, can be an effective mode for developing empathy (Burt, 2019; Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux, 1994; Finley, 2003; Morris, et al., 2005; Thexton, et al., 2019). Despite the substantial literature advocating for management humanities pedagogy, very little is known about the effectiveness of such approaches (Simons and McCormack, 2007). Do students develop the ethical worldview we expect them to when they read challenging works of fiction or view a canonical work of landscape painting? Does the experience of taking such a module have lasting effects on students’ professional development after graduation? Do students exposed to humanities learning gain valuable skills in making sense of their everyday reality in the workplace?

We therefore designed a research project to investigate the meanings and values developed and reflected upon by management students in their encounters with Business Humanities. Phenomenology is a particularly effective research method for investigating the development of meanings and values, including as a matter of lived experience outside the classroom (Starks and Brown Trinidad, 2007). Phenomenology can be defined as a form of research that, in developing understanding of a social phenomenon, prioritizes the perspectives of those who have experienced it in their own lives (Conklin, 2014; Heidegger, 1962; Lavery, 2003; Neubauer, et al., 2019). As a method, phenomenology has been used extensively to explore *meaning* in a wide variety of professional settings in management and organization studies (Burgoyne and Hodgson, 1983; Edwards, et al., 2006; Gibson, 2004; Kupers, 2008).

Of particular interest for our project is understanding what it *means* to be empathetic and develop empathic capacity, precisely the kind of issue phenomenology seeks to understand (Baillie, 1996; Bynum and Varpio, 2018; Neubauer, et al., 2019; Tavakol, et al., 2012). Phenomenological research, by prioritizing reflection on experience, can open insights into this highly subjective and personalized arena. Our data consist of three forms of personal reflection—interviews, reflective essays, and email correspondence—by participants who experienced Business Humanities first-hand. All students who completed the module in its first three years—which being experimental had small cohort sizes (averaging 16.7 students)—were invited to participate in our research, an overall population of 51 students. We used public search tools to find contact information for graduates; of the 50 students we were able to invite to participate, 14 completed semi-structured interviews (averaging 38 minutes in length), and 15 shared the reflective essays (each 2000 words) they had submitted for the module. In keeping with phenomenological methodology's insistence that researchers are not separate from the object of their research, we invited ourselves as the instructors on the module to participate in a semi-structured self-interview (1 hour 48 minutes) and to provide copies of email correspondence (four distinct email chains, totaling 2400 words) relating to the development and delivery of the module. All participants provided informed, written consent to participate in the research according to a protocol approved by the [ethics committee at university name redacted for review].

In collecting our data, we were not simply looking at immediate impact in the way that a course evaluation would do, e.g., asking students to rank their experience of the module on a Likert scale of satisfaction with our enthusiasm, preparedness, or seminar leadership. Instead, we attempted to evaluate the extent to which former students have applied and reflected upon the experiences and values from their engagement with Business Humanities in their post-university careers—careers that span a wide range of activities, including,

among others, entrepreneurship, IT services, work in the creative industries, strategic planning, data analysis, and marketing and operations in both for-profit and non-profit sectors. Rather than prescriptively assume what students and instructors may have experienced during and after the Business Humanities module, we sought to capture evidence based on the participants' own definitions of what they had done, felt, and thought about and what they believed they had gained from the experience.

Interview questions were developed with the aim of eliciting experiential reflections from both former students and the instructors (see **Appendix A**). Students were invited to re-read the reflective essays they had submitted for the module, enabling them to refresh their memories prior to their interviews. Questions were phrased not to elicit evaluative or analytical responses, but instead to encourage participants to discuss their emotions, activities, and memories. For students, this included reflections on their experiences reading and discussing texts and viewing images, writing discussion questions, engaging in groupwork, and in their postgraduate careers. For instructors, questions targeted the experience of consciously engaging as participants in a pedagogical innovation. Students' reflective essays added an important dimension to the dataset; pedagogical research has demonstrated how such essays can produce insights into student understanding of content and processes of development (Hosein and Rao, 2017). Each essay was produced in close temporal proximity to participation in the class, thus capturing a richness of close contextual embeddedness that can be less accessible in an interview format. In the essays, students had been prompted to reflect on two experiences: first, the process of completing a group project in which the students presented a "business case for the humanities" in the form of a "curated exhibit" to a fictional board of directors (1000 words); and second, on their development of skills and knowledge in the module in relation to their future career aspirations (1000 words).

Similarly, archived email correspondence among the instructors provided evidence of the emotions, expectations, and lived experiences of developing and delivering the module.

Our analysis of this experiential dataset took an inductive line. First, we analyzed the dataset by developing first-order terms, in keeping with the Gioia method of inductive research (Gioia et al., 2013). Using Nvivo software, the lead researcher read through all the data to develop a large number of initial codes capturing the richest possible set of experiences. These initial codes were then cross-checked for consistency by the second researcher. Furthermore, the second researcher read through all the interview transcripts and essays looking for standout themes, letting the totality of the dataset wash over the reader to gain a sense of the context of each document as well as the dataset as a whole. Some adjustments were consequently made to the initial coding structure to more fully capture the richness of the materials. For example, a new code was added regarding “Groupwork, emotional intelligence and sensitivity to others,” which upon re-reading stood out as a core theme across multiple essays. At the end of this first stage of analysis, a set of 107 first-order terms was applied systematically across the dataset, covering a range of experiences and emotions in relation to reading, writing, discussing, learning, and working with the humanities in various contexts (see **Appendix B**).

The researchers then sought to develop a more structured understanding by distilling these initial terms into a smaller array of second-order themes. Development of these 2nd-order themes was pursued alongside consideration of existing literature, not only in management learning but also in philosophy, literature, and history. From this iterative process emerged four themes, which we categorize as modes of “being” and “becoming”: *defamiliarization*, *intersubjectivity*, *abductive action*, and *self-liberation*, as detailed in the following section.

BEING AND BECOMING IN BUSINESS HUMANITIES

Student reflections on their experiences within the module reveal complex engagements with the humanities. Unfamiliar language and assessments generated discomfort but also critical reflection. Listening carefully to others was deemed both welcome and irritating. Reflecting on how their experiences fit within their personal development, students expressed nuanced understandings of the relationship between humanities learning and management careers, mixing satisfaction with skepticism. The first two modes of “being” presented below primarily reflect participants’ experiences within the timeframe of the coursework, while those we categorize as “becoming” relate mainly to participants’ forward-looking sensibilities in their transition to professional careers.

Defamiliarization

Profound feelings of being unmoored from the expectations of a traditional management learning environment abound in our dataset: “Sometimes I was like, ‘Oh my God, why am I doing this? Why? Why did I pick this module?’” Students likened the experience of Business Humanities to being stripped of the confidence in the knowledge they had gained over two and half years of management education; in the words of one interviewee, “it was like being back in high school when you’re a bit shy and you don’t really want to answer the questions because you might be wrong.” Students worried that their lack of literary training might pose limits to their performance. As one student noted in their reflective essay, “I had enjoyed literature [in secondary school] and had done quite well; however, I wouldn’t have described myself as a ‘reader’ and had lost the habit of reading more challenging literary texts since focusing on Business and Management.”

For many participants, the experience was remarkably strange. One assigned text (Spufford, 2016) mimics the prose of 18th-century experimental fiction, using challenging devices such as epistolary interjections and a beginning sentence that, at 191 words, covers

most of the first page. As one student remembered: “At first I was just thinking, ‘Oh my God, how am I going to get through this?’” Participants also found the assignments unsettling. The participation assessment took a novel form, tasking them with producing two 75-word questions (not answers) in relation to each week’s assigned text or visual artwork. Anxiety and uncertainty permeated the experience of writing questions: “I was really plucking at straws”; “am I doing this wrong, and it's not what [the instructor is] expecting?”; “maybe I'm asking the wrong question.”

This approach to humanities learning could be understood as generating epistemological doubt (Landfester and Metelmann, 2020a). From this perspective, the value of humanities pedagogy is that it leads management students to question the validity of the unambiguous frameworks and theories they have been exposed to via social science articles and management textbooks. Our data suggest, however, that students experienced such tasks as an emotional and aesthetic provocation as much as an intellectual one. Participants routinely described their experiences of *defamiliarization*, e.g., the process of disrupting habitual perceptions of reality by encountering common things in surprising ways. Defamiliarization has been used occasionally in business and management studies (Czarniawska, 2009; Henry and Lewis, 2023; King and Vickery, 2013; Morrell, 2008), but it has been fundamental to literary criticism since Viktor Shklovsky’s publication “Art as Technique” (2004 [1917]). Shklovsky criticized formulaic writing for undermining the purpose of literature, which he saw as “not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception” (2004: 19). Highlighting Leo Tolstoy’s methods for making “the familiar seem strange,” Shklovsky insisted that great art should be difficult for readers, prolonging the experience of sensations “as they are perceived and not as they are known” (2004: p 16). Literary and visual artists who unsettle their audiences succeed in producing a deeper

aesthetic experience, one that is removed from ordinary or habitual sensations (Oatley, 1999; Robinson, 2008; Thexton, et al., 2019).

For participants in Business Humanities, defamiliarization permeated experiences of reading texts and viewing art, but also writing assignments and working in groups. The difficulty of perceiving art deeply, spending significant amounts of time to do so without receiving an “answer” at the end of class, was not lost on students: “You know, we just sat around for two or three hours and we’ve not learnt anything about Turner’s painting.” The challenge of finding time to read lengthy works of fiction and also reflect on the reading was a consistent theme in participants’ interviews and essays. Yet our data also include many examples of students experiencing sensations of playfulness and humor via defamiliarization (Kark, 2011), e.g., likening the experience of the unstructured elements of the module to “playing as if it was like a poem” and relishing the unusual opportunity to “throw anything at” a group discussion of a work of art.

Intersubjectivity

Not every experience in Business Humanities was unsettling or unfamiliar. As one participant explained, the module invited a “wider spectrum of interpretations” of assigned materials, in contrast to “strategy or marketing modules where there’s less space for interpretation”—but then qualified the point, noting that diversity of interpretations “wasn’t something completely new to me.” After two years of seminar discussions and groupwork activities, participants came to Business Humanities predisposed to engage in *intersubjectivity*—moving from the “I” to the “we” by merging thoughts and feelings in relational conversations and experiences with others (Weick, 1995). Our dataset reveals a consistent theme of intersubjective experiences, involving a wide range of emotional and intellectual encounters, in which individual participants understood themselves as imbricated in a shared social web of not-

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3 always commensurate ideas and feelings (Ahn and Hong, 2019; Maitlis and Christianson,
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5 2014; Moore and Koning, 2016; Warren and Scharding, 2023).
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7
8 Viewing works of visual art and discussing them with classmates was a particularly
9
10 compelling mode for generating intersubjectivity. Students were often surprised or delighted
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12 to hear their classmates' widely differing interpretations of a painting such as George Inness'
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14 *Lackawanna Valley*, or the emotional expressions on the face of the *Woman of the High*
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16 *Plains* captured by Dorothea Lange's camera. One student "previously never understood how
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18 others could sit and look at an art piece for an extended amount of time" until the seminars
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20 "opened my eyes to the fact that everything in life has more to it than what initially meets the
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22 eye." Discovering that others had similar ideas—"and it wasn't just in my own head"—
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24 fostered a greater willingness to listen to what others had to say rather than "take your own
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26 perception into something and lead with that."
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31 Reading works of fiction produced feelings of connection with others beyond the
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33 classroom experience, as students related their own individual circumstances to those of
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35 fictional characters. Several students explicitly noted this in relation to their reading of
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37 Tolstoy's "Master and Man," including reflections on how the main character in the short
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39 story develops his own sense of intersubjectivity via a spiritual crisis. Works of science
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41 fiction invited students to empathize with alien creatures, in keeping with Liu's (2013)
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43 assertion that science fiction carries the capacity to move readers not only beyond their own
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45 feelings and ideas but also beyond those of *Homo sapiens* as a species. As with
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47 defamiliarization, however, even as students appreciated the experience of intersubjectivity,
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49 they also recognized how much time it took, to absorb "so many things going on and so many
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51 possibilities in so many interpretations to engage with." This struggle to find time for
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53 intersubjectivity is in keeping with the findings of Tomkins and Ulus (2015), who see most
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business school teaching as enabling narcissism rather than moving “beyond narcissism” as Liu (2013) would have it.

Importantly, our data reveal a high level of student awareness of the *value* of recognizing how others *feel* in relation to texts, artworks, or embodied practices in organizational settings. This valuation was routinely expressed not in ethical terms, but instead as emotionally rewarding, providing personal feelings of comfort, joy, and pleasure. As one essay noted, “It was comforting and motivating to find a concept [for the group project] that satisfied everyone. Indeed, for each member to be engaged, it is important for the task to be interesting.” Elevating emotion as a mode of knowing to a similar plane as that held by reason can be understood as an ethical position, particularly from a feminist stance (Mumby and Putnam, 1992). Yet repeatedly in our dataset it seems that even when participants were expanding their capacity to understand others’ feelings, they did so in ways that were rooted in self-awareness. As one interviewee noted in response to being re-presented with Dorothea Lange’s *Woman of the High Plains*, “If I had a really bad day, I could literally interpret this picture as like, she’s really depressed. She had a horrible day, and I can engage with that kind of emotion that comes through the picture because that’s how I am right now.” Affirmation of one’s self via intersubjective experiences is no doubt important—indeed it can be seen as a valuable motivational tool in organizational settings (Pessi, et al., 2022; Satama and Huopalainen, 2024)—but our data suggest that the ethical implications of intersubjective pedagogy are not as straightforward as claimed in the instrumentalist literature approach to management humanities. We return to this point in our Discussion below, after further presentation of the “becoming” elements of the Business Humanities experience.

Abductive Action

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3 Abduction (that is, interpreting from multiple specific cases to establish a plausible account
4 or plausible cause) is a mode of reasoning distinct from both deduction and induction.

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7 Drawing on the work of philosopher Charles S. Peirce, management scholars have
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9 increasingly advocated abductive reasoning as a means of promoting creativity, exploring the
10 unknown, and cultivating surprise in academic research (Locke, et al., 2008; Sætre and Van
11 de Ven, 2021). Less attention has been paid, however, to the ways in which non-academics
12 might deploy abductive mechanisms or actions to “reorient prevailing habits” (Golden-
13 Biddle, 2020), or to how management learners might be led to embrace surprise and doubt to
14 bring moral imagination into being in the material, contextualized circumstances of its
15 realization. Pierceian abduction can be understood as a mode of generating self-knowledge as
16 much as a form of reasoning, of becoming self-aware in the material world through iterative
17 observations and testing of possible outcomes in varied contexts (Charles and Thompson,
18 2021). When put into action, abductive thinking promises to offer not only new insights (the
19 way inductive logic can) but also applicability across multiple contexts, and thus is
20 potentially of great value for future entrepreneurs or managers tasked with creative endeavors
21 (Garbuio, et al., 2018; Nenonen, et al., 2017).

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23 For participants in Business Humanities, abduction emerged through experiences of
24 both known and unknown contexts. In addition to a way of *being* a student in a management
25 classroom, abductive action also entailed elements of *becoming* a capable graduate manager.
26 Participants often reflected on how their experiences in Business Humanities continued to
27 generate self-knowledge as they pursued their professional careers. As one graduate noted,
28 the class activities “helped me to understand how, the importance of making experiences, but
29 also the importance of asking myself questions regarding what’s in front of me.” Despite not
30 having read Peirce, the student neatly sums up the abductive mode of building understanding
31 from continually “making experiences” and then iteratively questioning those experiences.

Others highlighted the joy of sharing the surprises of their humanities learning with professional colleagues: “It’s always a very good talking point in interviews because everywhere I’ve been, nobody’s heard of [business humanities]. They say, ‘Oh, what? Why, how? What is that?’” In the interview, this statement was delivered with an ironic smile, suggesting an ongoing reckoning with the practical implications of taking a humanities mindset into the working world.

In composing weekly participation questions in the class, students were urged to consider the context in which the text or artwork had been produced. This mode of thinking, so different from other learning experiences in which students were expected to absorb a theoretical framework or model devoid of the context of its production—Five Forces, SWOT, 4Ps—“stuck” with students years after graduating. One noted that reading for context “probably did make me concentrate more”; another wondered aloud “why didn’t I do this before?” One graduate reported on their ongoing practice of contextualization in a professional setting, noting that “it’s nice to just look at it [an image or text], make up your own mind about what you think something is, and then look at the context in which it was created and compare the two.” Students clearly understood the personal and organizational value of considering texts as products and producers of contexts; as one essayist reflected, “if language allows and prevents things (as explored with Orwell), it is of extreme importance to pay attention to formulation”—an idea that participant sought to put into action after graduation by promoting gender equality and inclusion in the workplace. Another student reflected on how learning to contextualize enabled them to better critique policy documents in their professional work: “it’s very much reading between the lines of what they’re trying to say.”

The kind of self-awareness that emerges from abductive action is one in which the individual remains skeptical, in persistent doubt about the significance or meaning of any

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3 perception. Thus even students who reflected positively on the value of their experiences in
4
5 Business Humanities also questioned it; one student noted that despite their appreciation for
6
7 “nuanced and more granular thinking,” they repeatedly faced senior leaders who would “strip
8
9 down” their position papers, demanding a more positivist delivery in the form of bullet points
10
11 derived from hard evidence. Another noted in an essay that the humanities developed “soft
12
13 skills” whereas employers “will always require hard skills such as accounting, marketing and
14
15 coding”—raising skepticism about the “relevance in a professional sense” of humanities
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17 training. Or perhaps most profoundly, one exceptionally self-aware student noted in an
18
19 interview that perhaps none of the class participants had really transformed their ways of
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21 thinking, for if Business Humanities is “the class that you choose, the persons who choose it
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23 are already interested in it.”
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31 **Self-Liberation**

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33 The previous quote suggests that students had built-in expectations of what lay ahead when
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35 they chose to enroll in Business Humanities. Students may not have anticipated watching a
36
37 customized lowrider pickup truck dance and spin in an art gallery (Torres, 1997), but they did
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39 expect something different from their other classes. As one essay noted, “I took this module,
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41 not because I wanted to develop new management skills, but because I love reading poetry
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43 and novels and appreciating art.” Reflections on the module routinely referenced feelings of
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45 joy and satisfaction with the opportunity to read non-social science texts, referring to the
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47 experience as “calming” and satisfying. The embodied, immersive experience of analog
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49 rather than digital reading provided pleasure, “passion,” a return to reading as a “fun”
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51 experience that had “dramatically fell away” when slogging through online academic journal
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53 articles.
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Such experiences suggest that many participants in Business Humanities opted for the module in search of *self-liberation*, as a means of cultivating (or re-cultivating) an authentic sense of self. Business school students, perhaps even more so than other university students, are increasingly pressured to demonstrate success via attaining high marks, expanding their networks, and landing internships. Enrolling in Business Humanities was thus welcomed by students as a respite from the pressures of self-verification via externally imposed metrics, enabling instead a highly personalized means of measuring the value of their own education. The difference between this module and others was, according to one interviewee:

I actually enjoyed it a lot because I could put my own personality into it. So it wasn't just about like facts, numbers. 'This is how you have to solve it.' And this is exactly like what should be taught more of, like how to think outside the box. And probably that's why I enjoyed it the most because it was super creative and it was something different.

Such statements suggest that participants sought self-liberation via “negative capability” – a term taken by Saggurthi and Thakur (2015) from poet John Keats to mean “the ability to delight in doubt and revel in uncertainty” (p. 181) rather than seek speedy, decisive action. Transformational pedagogies that remove obstructions to exploring one’s authentic self are routinely lauded in the management education literature, as means of developing leadership capabilities, entrepreneurial creativity, and moral character (Adler, 2006; Bigo and Islam, 2021; Byrne, et al., 2022; Greenberg and Hibbert, 2022; Kay and Young, 2021; Martin, et al., 2018). Permeating the literature, however, is a common theme that management education previously provided this more holistic approach, but has since lost sight of enabling authentic selves rather than stripping them down (Bridgman, et al., 2016; O’Connor, 2011; Wadhwani and Viebig, 2021). Worried about being hurtled into unsatisfying postgraduate lives, final-

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3 year students in Business Humanities relished the opportunity to “stop and reflect” on “what I
4 was trying to pursue in my career.”
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8 An important element of fostering authentic experiences was that it liberated the
9 instructors as well as the students. One instructor remembered: “And you know, it's been, for
10 me, a very rewarding class to teach, just seeing the kind of joy actually, that is often present
11 as opposed to my [more mainstream] class.” The instructors worked hard to cultivate their
12 own “negative capability,” presenting themselves not as experts on any given week’s
13 materials but instead as equally curious members of a non-hierarchical group. Seeking to
14 avoid making students “feel guilty for their lack of knowledge” (Huber and Knights, 2021),
15 instructors avoided lecturing while encouraging unstructured, emotive learning activities,
16 including alternately shouting and whispering stressed and unstressed syllables in a group
17 reading of poetry. “You had so much freedom,” remembered one student, as there were
18 “literally no wrong answers, especially with the group project.” Another student remembered
19 the space of experience as one where all participants co-created the learning outcomes: “Like,
20 I could really kind of build a class because we could bring what we wanted to talk about from
21 the novel or from the thing we had to read or to view.” Released from the pressures of
22 delivering the “right answer,” both students and instructors found themselves “born anew out
23 of the event,” much like the participants in O’Doherty’s (2020) experiment in screening the
24 plotless and nearly wordless sensory film *Leviathan*.
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50 DISCUSSION

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52 Our findings partially confirm existing research that rejects the science-envying
53 paradigm that remains at the core of management education (Statler and Guillet de
54 Monthoux, 2015). Evidence of *abductive action*, for instance, highlights how students
55 engaged not in logical empiricism, instead proceeding from iterative testing and
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3 experimentation with ideas rather than from assumptions about an objectively measurable
4 world. *Defamiliarization*, likewise, provided students with an alternative to rational choice,
5 exposing students to the recognition that individual self-interests are never free of ambiguity.
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7 Forced to probe the contextual meaning of complex and ambiguous texts, students
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9 demonstrated awareness of the value of incorporating symbols and metaphors into their
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11 understanding of how to exercise knowledge in practice, undermining functionalist
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13 epistemologies. Furthermore, evidence of *intersubjectivity* underscores the value of the
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15 humanities for encouraging management learners to relate to others as members of a
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17 constructed community, in direct opposition to agency theory's assumption of individualistic
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19 opportunism.
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26 Our students thus demonstrated significant capacity for rupturing the standard
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28 expectations of management education. Yet our findings go much further, by highlighting the
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30 value of reclaiming the expansive approach to moral imagination developed from the early
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32 work of Robert Coles (1989). Within the dominant instrumentalist approach to management
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34 humanities, Coles is recently reduced to the merest mention that "the limitations of cases for
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36 business ethics education have sparked the relatively new pedagogical method of using
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38 books, novels, and short stories in the classroom, first introduced by Coles (1989)" by
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40 Brokerhof et al (2023: 7). In this reading of Coles' influence, we might expect students
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42 assigned to read literary texts to develop capacity to achieve specific valuable managerial
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44 outcomes: e.g., defamiliarization will lead to sustainable strategy-making (Audebrand, 2010),
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46 or intersubjectivity will enhance employee productivity by cultivating sensemaking capacity
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48 (Barry and Meisiek, 2010).
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54 Coles' work, however, stretches well beyond "using" fiction in the classroom as a
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56 linear exercise in developing "moral muscle." Coles arrived at his humanities-based
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58 pedagogy in the wake of a life-altering interaction with Ruby Bridges, who at the age of six
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was the first black pupil to attempt desegregation at Frantz Elementary in New Orleans in November 1960. In the face of extreme, incessant, and traumatizing harassment from teachers and white parents, Ruby surprised Coles by explaining that she felt sorry for her tormentors rather than angry at them. “I was struck dumb and I was silent, because I had to reflect upon this child’s wisdom,” recalled Coles decades afterward (Swick, 2005). Moral awareness, Coles realized, was not something acquired later in life – it was present from a very early age, at a basic level, rather than being developed only when other faculties had reached a greater degree of sophistication. Coles then published a stream of work that took children’s capacities as moral and social actors seriously, interviewing thousands of children, including many in minority communities.

As a result of his work with children, Coles began to integrate humanistic literature into medical courses at Harvard University, initially to develop in adults what he had seen was so alive in children, but was often “professionalized” out of them – their moral imagination. Work with medics, writers and poets – including William Carlos Williams, who was all three – led to the development of the field of Medical Humanities, of which he became the first Professor. In the 1980s the success of his major course led to its extension to lawyers, the school of government, and eventually into Harvard Business School. In 1989 he published the book that captured this inspiration and connected to a good deal of unspoken aspiration in business and management school education: *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination* (Coles, 1989). An anthology of readings included in his Harvard Business School courses was later published (Coles and LaFarge, 2008).

The premise running throughout all of Coles’ work is simple but nevertheless demanding to embrace fully: the moral conduct of the individual is a response to the moral imperative of the need of others shaped by our moral imagination. This has clear resonances with the work of philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas (1991; Rhodes 2020), who emphasizes the

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3 recognition of responsibility for the other as being the first ethical moment of philosophy. As
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5 Roberts (2021: 481) notes, Lévinas uncovers “our innate capacities for an ethical response to
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7 the other,” which is exactly what Coles found in his many interviews with children. As
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9 Roberts (2021: 482) also emphasizes, this response “is beyond or prior to language and
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11 representation” and should not be confused with the espousal of ethical principles, codes of
12
13 conduct, any calculus of moral decision-making, or the “assertion of good intentions.”
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15 Engaging with this response then needs to use figurative modes that push evocative language
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17 to its limits, or employ other symbolic forms. For Lévinas, ethics is not an option – it is rather
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19 an “unavoidable and unchosen felt responsibility to the other that arises as a consequence of
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21 human sentience,” it is a one-way responsibility that does not depend on reciprocity,
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23 recognition, or effectiveness – it is not a moral economy or a moral calculus. Important for
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25 both Coles and Lévinas is the simultaneity of recognition, imagination, and action taking
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27 place in a context over time – both immediate and historic, relational and processual rather
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29 than a staged and stepwise progression (Brokerhof, et al., 2023: 10). Unlike Brokerhof, et al.
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31 (2023: 8) we do not separate sources of moral complexity from sources of moral imagination,
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33 nor do we find it useful to follow Hargrave, et al. (2020) in breaking down imagination into
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35 different subtypes. What the Colesian approach insists is that moral imagination comes into
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37 being in the specific circumstances of its realization.
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45 From this perspective, bringing humanities into management learning primarily
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47 serves the purpose of enabling recognition that moral imagination is reflexively aware of its
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49 own situatedness, and is open to critical perspectives on this situation from a multiplicity of
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51 directions. At the same time, it remains creative and adaptable in terms of its methods, and
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53 follows the need rather than the rule. This is not developing “moral emotions,” for
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55 ‘sharpening and deepening moral sensibilities,’ and for developing empathy” (Macnaughton,
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57 2017: 235) as a *tool* of the management practitioner; it is rather a seeing of the problems of
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managers in organizational worlds through the lens of the “much wider contexts of society, politics, cultures, religions, and technologies” (Macnaughton, 2017: 235) without losing sight of the illuminating subjectivity that recognises these problems as problems in the first place (Viney, et al., 2015; Whitehead, et al., 2016).

Indeed, the evidence we have presented here strongly suggests that rather than developing *new* capacities in students, the Business Humanities experience instead *enabled* students to exercise their innate capacity to act as well-rounded, reflective individuals. Their experiences of reading poetry and prose was often rewarding, liberating, and productive of self-awareness, even if not (or perhaps because it was not) instrumentally valuable to their future careers as managers. Self-reflection and moral engagement, in the words of one interviewee, had “always been kind of part of the way I was educated” – doing so via the Business Humanities module was “just continuing that.” Interviewees understood the potential instrumental value of their management humanities learning, but also maintained a healthy skepticism:

And [the fact that I took this module] always generates conversation. And it's quite interesting because some people think ... 'that might be useful to bring into a corporate culture....' Whereas other places, they say, 'Why did you waste time on that?' But you know, it's good to hear the feedback and generate conversation. So yeah, it does. It does help my way of working because it makes you more human
(Interview J).

Variations on this theme of being and becoming “more human” appeared throughout our dataset. Importantly, participants emphasized that such an outcome was not a simple consequence of a one-off engagement with the module, but was instead a part of their lifelong journey towards becoming themselves—and incidentally, employable:

I was not trying to reduce everything to a logic but I was instead embracing things in their duality and a priori existence. Such “thinking” gave me the possibility to reflect about my future. For instance, while reading Tolstoy (1895), I started to wonder what I was trying to pursue in my career: “Am I solely pursuing money? But then, thinking about Vasily, at what cost?” It was evident for me, again, how the humanities do not provide answers but force people to stop and reflect. (Essay H)

Our findings thus further contribute to the ongoing debate in psychological research as to whether it is empathy or self-awareness that is the primary result of engaging with “high” literature. Kidd and Castano (2013) and Mar and Oatley (2008) have argued that the act of engaging with challenging fictional texts generates empathic capacity, an influential argument that has been adopted widely as a justification for management humanities education (Bosch Badia et al., 2019; Martineau and Cyr, 2024; Michaelson, 2016; Thexton et al., 2019). The appeal of this argument may rest not only upon its justificatory potential for management humanities, however, but also upon a specific rendering of what we mean by “empathy.” Literary scholars have increasingly disputed the notion that reading novels leads to a straightforward development of empathy, if by empathy one means that imagining the inner life of others produces unambiguous ethical outcomes of prosocial behavior (Hammond and Kim, 2014; Keen, 2007; Lindhé, 2016). Scholars of 18th- and 19th-century literature have demonstrated that prior to the mid-20th century, reading poetry and fictional prose was understood as a fully embodied experience, in which a more somatic rather than ethical outcome was the expectation (Greiner, 2011; Morgan, 2012). Even in the process of imagining others’ lives and feelings, the act of reading was understood as a *personal* exercise in self-awareness. In the twentieth century, “empathy” increasingly took on psychological rather than embodied connotations, coming to its current form as a matter of ethical “caring about others”—and thus closer to the 18th-century meaning of “sympathy,” while in our own

time suggesting the possibility of developing “moral muscle” through reading (Jahoda, 2005).

Yet reflecting upon our findings reveals that students may have been closer to the 18th-century experience, valuing the act of reading literature for allowing them to come to terms with their own senses and sensibilities first:

I remember just crying and reflecting on it [the death of a character in Tolstoy's “Master and Man”] and thinking, ‘Wow, this is a really, really great experience....’ I remember engaging with the text, even with the Spufford novel as well ... and the moment, you know, when they have the duel and [the central character] ends up killing his friend. That really affects him as well, I think I did, I cried then as well.... I’m not ashamed to say that I cried.... When I engage with such things, like even listening to music or things, I get really immersed in it, really engaged in it.

(Interview A)

Rather than being “transported” to a fictional world demanding empathic connection with others, this example suggests that “immersion” in that world draws greater attention to one’s self. This is in keeping with research arguing that literature enables self-awareness as a precondition to pro-social consideration of others (Koopman and Hakemulder, 2015).

Importantly, this more subtle understanding of empathy does not preclude capacity for ethical behavior. In line with the Colesian approach to moral imagination, self-awareness is in fact a crucial underpinning of moral behavior, but it is situated in real time-place-experience, not the abstract fictional world. From this perspective, the moral value of reading literature is not that it transports the reader to a nonexistent place, but that it enriches the reader’s experience of the world in which they actually live. For professional managers, that is a world in which confronting ethical challenges occurs daily, requiring an ongoing *reflexive* approach to learning rather than a merely backward-looking *reflection* on their

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3 university experience. Management learning in the humanities thus becomes paradoxically
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5 “useful” because it is a heightening of reality rather than an escape from it.
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8 However, one further layer of reflection draws us to the possibility that teaching
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10 management humanities in this liberatory mode—enabling, rather than “developing,” moral
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12 imagination—may verge on the impossible. From the onset, the Business Humanities module
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14 was in danger of cancellation due to relatively low enrolments. Although the students who
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16 signed up for the module valued its non-instrumentalist approach both before and after their
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18 experience in the class, it is easy to see why those who avoided the module might have been
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20 quite anxious about directly exploring not only their own emotions and values, but also of
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22 questioning the management knowledge they had imbibed up to that point. As one student
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24 noted in a reflective essay, they came into the class assuming the humanities were
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26 “purposeless and outside their career development priorities,” a position reversed while
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28 undertaking the module. This hints, however, at the difficulty of establishing the legitimacy
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30 of such an approach. Indeed, from 2022 to 2023, the module did not run due to lack of
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32 enrolment. The class did proceed in 2024, but unexpectedly low enrolment figures led the
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34 class to be canceled in 2025.
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42 **CONCLUSION**
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45 Our research contributes to the substantial body of literature arguing strongly for the
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47 value of the humanities in management education. Interviews and reflective essays from
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49 participants in the module overwhelmingly convey considerable sensitivity to art and
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51 literature as means of understanding, and as means of thinking about (or rethinking) business
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53 and management from fresh perspectives. Students experienced humanities content in a
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55 management setting as a pleasant and rewarding surprise. Our findings reinforce ongoing
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57 campaigns to re-integrate the liberal arts and the art of management. The capacity of the
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humanities as an aid to self-development, and to open different ways of seeing and thinking is an argument for their wider use in management education; without this, business and management students are shorn of an important way of accumulating meaningful knowledge and cultural awareness.

Our core contribution, however, is to suggest that management humanities education is not “useful” in the sense usually promoted within the institutional requirements of business schools, as an instrumental tool for developing ethics, empathy and sensemaking skills for future managers. In this regard we acknowledge arguments that the humanities are not intended to be useful and that the content of liberal arts education is often forgotten quickly after graduation because it suffers from application atrophy (Brennan, 2023; Stover, 2018). Yet our research highlights how such arguments may be fundamentally missing the point. The results of our project suggest that the most useful elements of management humanities pedagogy emerged from the experience of *learning* rather than the process of *knowledge acquisition*; rather than expecting students to directly “transfer” knowledge gained in the course into their working lives, we tasked future managers with coming to terms with who they were and who they wanted to be – in this sense, art is a *way of knowing* (Allen, 1995).

Teaching literature *as* literature, and art *as* art, offers substantial benefits in engaging with uncertainty and complexity in real-world business contexts, what Vaill (1996) poetically called the “permanent whitewater” of management. Yet operationalizing such an approach, as morally and aesthetically necessary as it may be for the future of management, may also be largely impossible within the current confines and preferences of the business school, even in one actively re-purposing itself to serve the public good rather than private profit. Whereas discipline-hopping forays into, say, foreign language acquisition, coding, or law, may be seen as adding practical utility value to business students, the benefits of the humanities to the individual may be opaque and uncertain. The evidence offered in this article suggests that a

major reason why such barriers exist is that claims for the value of management humanities have been made on instrumentally ethical grounds, rather than on the more challenging grounds of sparking moral imagination, somatic self-awareness, and a richer cultural worldview. When we think of the transition from being to becoming, it is often energized by an “event” – of thinking, feeling, learning, responding. The concept of "event" in Deleuze and Guattari is something that *changes* - the way we think, as O'Doherty (2020) implies, but more importantly the way we feel and respond intensively to experience. It reorients everything, the whole complex assemblage wriggles and writhes and may take flight into a new direction. This may or may not lead to specific actions, as aesthetic responses are not teleological, even if that teleology is complicated: they are complex and uncertain and admit multiple, ambiguous, contradictory and paradoxical outcomes. Encountering art as art rather than a tool for utilitarian purposes encourages students to fully engage with this enigmatic complexity and be changed by events - which sensitizes and increases their capacity to respond to future events (Thanem and Wallenberg, 2021). Yet as valuable as this learning has proven to be for the participants in Business Humanities, we have yet to fully convince our university administrators that wriggling and writhing are positive learning outcomes.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions (Students)

Begin with an introductory explanation that this is not a module evaluation, we are not concerned with whether the student “liked” the class, the teaching style, the content, etc. What we are interested in is the student’s experience both during and after the module.

1. The Business Humanities module involves reading various texts--novels, short stories, and poems.
 - a. Can you tell us about *when* and *where* you did your reading for the module?
 - b. Do you remember any particular *feelings* you experienced when reading these texts?
 - i. [Potential follow-up]: Instructors in the module emphasized the importance of critically analyzing *symbolism and language* as well as the *context* of the texts we read. What was it like to read the assigned novels, short stories, and/or poems in this way?
 - c. Prior to taking the module, did your *previous reading experiences* (either for academic purposes or for leisure) prepare you in any way for the readings in Business Humanities?
2. In addition to reading written texts, we also looked at works of visual art in the module, including paintings, photographs, and performance art.
 - a. The photographer Dorothea Lange, some of whose work we looked at in class, once stated that she understood the camera as “an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera.” How does this idea of being “taught how to see” resonate with your experience of viewing visual art in the module? [**Show image of *Woman of the High Plains*, 1938**]
 - b. When we discussed various works of visual art in the class--for instance, George Inness’s *Lackawanna Valley* or J. M. Turner’s *Snow Storm: Steamboat off a Harbour’s Mouth*--not all students interpreted the works as conveying the same *meaning*. [**Show these images to the subject.**] What was it like for you to hear and think about ways of seeing art that might have been different from your own initial interpretations?
3. One of the main assessments in the module was to write a set of critical participation questions each week, based on your reading of the assigned texts or images for that week. Both questions were meant to be framed to generate critical reflective group discussion. One question was expected to explore *symbolism or language* in that week’s materials, while the other was focused on the *context* of the work.

- a. How did you find the experience of producing these weekly questions? How did the experience compare to other types of assignments you did during your degree programme?
 - b. One of the reasons for having these participation questions was to encourage everyone who came to weekly class discussions to be prepared to talk about their own interpretations of the materials. In your experience, did these exercises produce the kinds of discussions you expected to have regarding the readings? How so, or how not?
4. Another important assessment in the module was a group project, in which your team was asked to present a “business case for the humanities” in the form of a “curated exhibit” to a fictional board of directors.
- a. Can you talk about what your group did for your project, if you remember?
 - b. The instructions for the group project include only a few specific instructions regarding the timing and content of the presentation. Most of the big decisions about how to approach the task were left to students to address in their own creative ways. How did your group approach the project? How did you generate creative ideas?
5. Broader reflection
- a. We state at the outset of the module that there are “no wrong answers” and that we welcome playfulness, fanciful ideas, irony, and humor in the classroom. How did that approach fit (or not fit) with the rest of your experience on your undergraduate degree?
 - b. Thinking about your experience now, after having graduated, how has your approach to work and to your personal development been influenced by your experience in the Business Humanities module?
 - c. One of the reasons we developed this module at York was that a 2011 report from the Carnegie Foundation urged business schools to put their students “on a path toward becoming fully reflective business professionals and not simply technicians.” Do you feel that you are on the path of a “fully reflective business professional?”
 - d. Is there anything that you want to tell us that we haven’t asked about, or do you have any questions for us?

Interview Questions (Instructors)

1. What were you imagining this module would be like when you were developing it in summer-autumn 2017?
 - a. Give a summary of your role/teaching within the module? How have you adapted/changed it over the three (now four) years that the module has run?
 - b. Prior to developing this module, how did your previous teaching experience prepare you for teaching Business Humanities?
 - c. What, if anything, has surprised you about the module/teaching/student interaction? Have there been any disappointments? What worked/did not work?
- 2) Tell us about some of the memorable experiences you've had while teaching the module.
 - a. Preparing for seminars, selecting and reading texts / images
 - b. Interactions with students in seminars
 - c. Supporting and marking assessments
 - i. Participation
 - ii. Presentations
 - iii. Reflective essays
- 3) How, if at all, has your experience of the module altered your views of the role (and/or potential) of the humanities within business education?
- 4) In the assessment for the students, we ask them to "make a case for the business humanities"; what would you say is the primary justification and benefit of using a humanities approach within the business/management curriculum?
- 5) What do you think is the most valuable aspect of the module, for you, and, potentially differently, for the students?

Appendix B

Initial Coding Structure

1ST ORDER	Files	References
Assessments as frustrating experience	2	2
Assessments as fun experience	4	8
Assessments as uncertain experience	2	4
Assessments requiring diverse skillsets	7	11
Awareness of contemporary events	1	1
Continuing engagement with art after graduation	6	15
Continuing engagement with language, context analysis	10	23
Continuing engagement with literature after graduation	4	15
Continuing engagement with qualitative analysis after graduation	2	6
Continuing reflection after graduation	11	90
Cultural capital of humanities knowledge	7	19
Empathic identification with co-worker	5	31
Empathic identification with customers, clients	1	6
Empathic identification with fictional experience	6	45
Empathic identification with subject in visual art	2	3
Graduate career in relation to university degree	7	15
Graduate career satisfaction	13	41
Graduate career uncertainty	1	7
Graduate career, teamwork	1	8
Graduate career, value of empathy, reflection, soft skills	15	49
Group discussion as challenging experience	2	4
Group discussion as immersive experience	3	10
Groupwork as anxious experience	1	2
Groupwork as challenging experience	4	7
Groupwork as liberating experience	7	22
Groupwork as pleasurable experience	7	19
Groupwork as unfair, free-rider problem	4	10
Groupwork requiring diverse skillsets	4	15
Groupwork, emotional intelligence and sensitivity to others	11	29
Groupwork, reconciling alternative viewpoints	14	45
Humanities in relation to external pedagogical trends	1	1
Humanities in relation to other management modules	8	29
Imagining a humanities module	7	26
Learning as uncertain experience	5	10
Learning by doing	4	17
Learning by experiencing alternative viewpoints	10	91
Learning by exploring	6	39

Learning by playing	12	55
Learning online in lockdown	8	17
Learning through active participation	2	9
Presentation as affective experience	5	26
Reading as active experience	2	6
Reading as anxious experience	2	10
Reading as challenging experience	2	4
Reading as cosmopolitan, diverse experience	5	17
Reading as daunting experience	3	7
Reading as destressing, relaxing experience	4	7
Reading as immersive experience	6	17
Reading as pleasurable experience	7	28
Reading as reflective experience	2	10
Reading as revelatory experience	2	3
Reading as spiritual experience	1	2
Reading as subjective, personal experience	1	1
Reading as surprising experience	1	7
Reading as uncertain or ambiguous experience	4	13
Reading as unplanned experience	2	5
Reading fiction vs. non-fiction or social science	13	50
Reading for ambiguous language	4	8
Reading for context	11	57
Reading for form or structure	1	3
Reading for symbolism	3	14
Reading paper vs digital text	1	5
Sensemaking in business context	8	21
Sensemaking of contemporary sociopolitical context	10	26
Sensemaking of work situations	3	9
Space for interpretation	4	16
Space of experience not significant	1	1
Space of experience, distracting area	2	2
Space of experience, limits to accessibility	1	1
Space of experience, restful and relaxing area	7	22
Space of experience, traveling by train	1	3
Space of experience, varied to maintain concentration	1	4
Space of experience, welcoming of ideas and discussion	3	17
Space of experience, work focus area	4	7
Teaching as a learning experience	2	5
Teaching as a productive experience	1	4
Teaching as an experiment	1	26
Teaching as challenging experience	1	5
Teaching as empathic experience	1	9

Teaching as engagement with diverse perspectives	1	5
Teaching as frustrating experience	1	4
Teaching as rewarding experience	2	3
Teaching as uncertain experience	1	2
Time constraints, hurried analysis	2	9
Time constraints, making time for analysis or reflection	7	29
Time Constraints, making time for groupwork	1	2
Time constraints, making time to read	8	41
Time constraints, making time to view art	2	4
Viewing art as aesthetic experience	4	6
Viewing art as challenging experience	3	9
Viewing art as cosmopolitan, diverse experience	14	101
Viewing art as immersive experience	2	4
Viewing art as spiritual experience	1	3
Viewing art as subjective, personal experience	8	35
Viewing art as uncertain ambiguous experience	3	18
Viewing art as unfamiliar or defamiliarizing experience	2	15
Viewing art for context	4	20
Viewing art for form or structure	1	4
Viewing art for symbolism	1	2
Viewing art for technique of composition	3	7
Writing as challenging experience	3	17
Writing as difficult experience	1	3
Writing as pleasurable experience	2	6
Writing as reflective experience	2	10
Writing as rewarding experience	1	5
Writing as uncertain experience	4	9