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## BOOK REVIEW: DEBATING BUSINESS SCHOOL LEGITIMACY. ATTACKING, ROCKING, AND DEFENDING THE STATUS QUO

Anders Örtenblad & Riina Koris (2023). *Debating Business School Legitimacy. Attacking, Rocking, and Defending the Status Quo*. Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN. 978-3-031-12727-4

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## BOOK REVIEW

The book, 'Debating Business School Legitimacy,' is not primarily a debate book. In the introduction, the publisher apologizes for the absence of a comprehensive debate on the subject. However, the book offers a broad collection of reflections on the topic, with voices that are often more concerned than critical. Despite the apology, the book contains several contributions that undoubtedly contribute to the debate and engage the reader in a critical discussion.

Various types of education are subject to scrutiny and discussion on many different platforms. When it comes to the debate on education in general, legitimacy is not often the central focus. Although, as the authors rightly point out, there is a significant amount of literature on this topic as well. However, legitimacy can be influenced by what emerges from the debate. Teacher training programs

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may not focus enough on dealing with groups of students with varying abilities, or textile training programs may not focus enough on environmental aspects. While these issues may not be the subject of the debate on legitimacy per se, they can affect legitimacy, especially if educational programs differ in quality. If the shortcomings have an impact on how well the graduates perform in the job market and how well the research stands up when assessed, legitimacy can be affected.

Higher education is constantly scrutinized. Those who attend have opinions, and those who want to attend have expectations. Employers have views on what the newly educated can do and how well they are equipped to learn new things. The media often reports on education in relation to civil status, and occasionally digs into some type of education. And researchers are often interested in what is taught and how it is taught. Educational institutions are also subject to scrutiny, although commemorative historical publications dominate.

The book's focus is not solely on education but also, albeit to a lesser extent, on research. Research is rarely scrutinised or constantly scrutinised, depending on whether one looks for independent scrutiny of research or scrutiny done within the research bubble. And it is true that how research turns out is essential for institutional legitimacy. So, it is not at all unreasonable. But it also means that the book somewhat loses focus, especially as business schools, which are weak in research or very uneven in terms of research, still fare relatively well by having a strong legitimacy base in their presence and anchoring in the local community.

"Debating Business School Legitimacy" does not purport to present a single view. What would it be for a debate book? But the chapters often have the same approach to their criticism. More on this shortly. And they are noticeably differently worked out. For example, Chapter 2, which takes a historical approach, should have been given more space or omitted altogether. Now it becomes a superficial entry point to the question. And perhaps the book would have benefited from an initial conceptual clarification that had more depth.

Criticism in several of the book's chapters starts from what Business Schools claim they want to be or what is best for the general public (in the eye of the chapter authors) should be. It's a bit naive. I still remember a study of employees at petrol stations who thought their job was to sell petrol and car accessories (that was before they started selling lattes and hot dogs), while the head office claimed to work for a better global environment (where fuel consumption should decrease). The vast majority of those who attend Business Schools or choose to hire the graduates do not value a critical approach to business. On the contrary.

Many agree with the authors of Chapter 3 that much could be gained by better integrating sustainability with economic success in various ways. Further research on this topic is needed. However, the connection to "Business School Legitimacy" must be preceded by more general societal changes. Politics must take the lead here. Nevertheless, the reasoning about "Business Schools in Their Ideological Prison" sparks debate. Chapter 4 on "Business Schools Neoliberal Neurosis" also provokes discussion. It is written as an energetic critique but could also be read as a defence. The author should have been braver and done both. However, internal debate within a short chapter is not easy to achieve. Chapter 5, which concludes the book's first substantive part (Part II "Attacking Status Quo" after "Background and Introduction"), also relates to the "neoliberal transformation" that has so shaped our societies and is clearly represented by students from our Business Schools. One question worth discussing is how this

view of what society needs affects students' health. The chapter is interesting but would benefit from a clearer connection to research done in business schools. What is taught often lags behind research, especially at the undergraduate level.

In Part III of the book, "Rocking the Boat of Status Quo," the critical contributions to the debate continue. The chapter headings still contain dramatic elements and unnecessarily long titles. A more heavy-handed editor would have helped the reader navigate better. And of course, it's tiresome when so many chapters begin with "Introduction." Legitimacy means different things for the contributors to the book. It can be allowed to remain that way, although the reading would benefit from a concept clarification. Chapter 6 commendably highlights that the environment is not homogeneous, but the authors do not do much with the obvious fact that the view of what is legitimate and what is not also varies. Criminal gangs in Sweden, for example, would not be as successful if they sought legitimacy from everyone. Chapter 7 addresses women's underrepresentation in business schools. It is more of a description of the situation than a contribution to the debate. The solution also seems to be slowly progressing as many educational institutions now recruit the best students, where women dominate. Chapter 8 raises the question of what internationalization actually means and requires of good education, calling for a deeper level of understanding. Perhaps we can agree on this without further debate.

Chapter 9, "On How Intercultural Management Education Can Increase the Societal Legitimacy of Business Schools," provides an account of this very issue. No debate is presented in this chapter. Similarly, in chapter 10, the explanation for success despite weaknesses is given without any debate. Chapter 11 continues in the same vein, with interesting insights that do not necessarily lead to "Rocking the Boat of Status Quo." Perhaps these chapters could have been added to Part IV, even though "Defending Status Quo" may be too strong a label. In this section, only Chapter 14 remains, which highlights that other educational institutions, and indeed, educational programs, also face issues of legitimacy. Chapters 12 and 13 were skipped over in haste, but at this point in the book, readers would rather engage in their own debates than be presented with reflections that for reasons are placed near the end of the book.

In "Debating Business School Legitimacy," no debate is really presented, and several chapters are not in themselves contributions to any ongoing debate. Nonetheless, it is a valuable book for the debates it inspires. It is the book's ability to stimulate discussion and reflection that speaks to its worth.

## REFERENCES

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