14 December 2017

**Response to Decision Letter on Manuscript ID JME-17-0113-BAM.R1 “Overcoming the problem with solving business problems: Using theory differently to rejuvenate the case method for turbulent times.”**

Dear Professor Hibbert,

Thank you very much to you and the two reviewers for another round of thoughtful and detailed feedback on our submission. We are pleased that you continue to see merit in our paper and are grateful to have been given a final opportunity to revise it. We also greatly value your guidance on how to navigate this revision, given the divided positions of the two reviewers. Whilst Reviewer 2 has taken a more negative position, this reviewer’s comments have been helpful in illustrating the need for us to make our position clearer and stronger.

In this letter, we first respond to the two points of ‘editorial guidance’ that you provided in your decision letter. We then respond to individual points raised by the two reviewers.

**Editorial Guidance**

*1. Reviewer 1’s comments. These are all related to specific points in your revised text and you should consider each point carefully. Some relate to subtle shifts in point of view or argumentation, and if you find that you cannot cumulatively accommodate all of these without diluting your position, it would be acceptable to offer a specific comment in your response letter for each particular point that was not accommodated. However, overall, we would expect that the majority of the reviewer’s precise and helpful comments will be implemented (perhaps with some adaptation) as minor revisions in your text.*

We have accommodated most of this reviewer’s suggestions – either directly or in a modified form. The points we considered but decided against incorporating were numbers 8, 9 and 12. Regarding point 8, Nyland et al (2014) does not mention Donham or Whitehead, and in our investigations and archival work we did not come across any discussion of their opinions on, or response to, the ILO’s loss of funding. The argument put forward by the reviewer (that they ‘had to be aware’) feels speculative and, in any case, pursuing this angle would seem beyond the scope of our objectives for the paper. Similarly, whilst this reviewer raises (in point 9) an interesting debate about the Hawthorne Studies, we also felt this was not sufficiently central to our purposes. In relation to point 12, whilst we did incorporate a reference to Hühn, we did not adopt Reviewer 1’s suggestion of changing our position on the legitimacy of neo-liberalism. We want students to understand work and organization through different ideological worldviews, and we make this point in the revision, using your own 2012 paper in JME.

*2. Reviewer 2’s comments. This reviewer helpfully shows that it is not obvious to them what the precise purpose of your manuscript is at the outset, and thus it is hard to judge whether its purpose has been achieved in a coherent way. They also highlight a lack of grounding of the argument in places, which also makes it less persuasive for them. In some respects, we think that work which takes an essay form will have more ‘narrative development’ and some speculative and provocative angle is actually very welcome in this kind of submission. That is partly what makes your paper an engaging and interesting read for us.*

We have added citations to better ground our argument in places (see point 2b below). We slightly revised our claim to be that of a questioning (rather than collapse) of the neoliberal consensus but have not further substantiated the claim, which serves as a scene-setter for our paper. This phenomenon is being discussed widely in the scholarly and popular presses, and we feel doing more here would give us less space for delivering on the objectives of the paper. We have taken your comment about the ‘speculative and provocative angle’ as suggesting you are comfortable with this aspect of the manuscript, but if we have misread your intent, please let us know and we would be happy to revise accordingly.

*But the reviewer has a point in that it is also important to: give the reader a clearer expectation of why they should engage with the paper; signal how the narrative journey will unfold; and to justify your argument in key places.*

Yes, we agree and have made revisions accordingly.

*To address this reviewer’s comments, therefore, we suggest that:  
a.      You expand the ‘signposting’ paragraph on page 4 of your paper, to give a more detailed sense of how the paper will unfold, including some brief outline argument of why you link the conceptual domains (or arrange the narrative) in the way that you do. We think that you could accomplish this in around half a page to a page of text.*

This was a helpful steer and we have considerably revised the introduction to give a more detailed overview of our argument and how we proceed with it. We have also extended the third paragraph of the conclusion to further clarify why we believe the experiences of Donham and Whitehead are useful in rethinking the possibilities for the case method in today’s turbulent times.

*b.      Look at the key disconnections highlighted by the reviewer, and make small changes in the paper to help make the connections clearer and more clearly justified. In many cases, this can be fixed with appropriate citations that provide warrant for your argument or anchor claims about the context of current debates. Much of this can be sorted out in the introduction, where (while the argument seems appropriate to the editors) there is a distinct lack of citations to anchor quite large points of argument. You may need to add a sentence or two to improve the precision of your argument as you address these lacunae.*

Reviewer 2 makes a good point here. We accept that we did not make sufficiently clear the connections between the historical aspects of the paper, and the three recommendations based on our experience. In revising the paper, we have included in the discussion of each recommendation an explicit connection to the historical analysis. In terms of the lack of citations, we have added several to the second paragraph in the introduction which relate to the implications for business schools of the questioning of the neo-liberal consensus. And we have added a further four citations to an expanded explanation of critical reflexive practice.

*Another place where there is a need for some additional anchorage is in the discussion: the connection between the (critically) reflexive critique of society evident in key historical actors’ perspectives, and your own approach to the case method, could be clarified. One way to do this would by adding a brief paragraph tying these together in relation to a small number of key works on reflexivity in management (education), although you may have an alternative approach to resolving this that you can articulate. But we do not anticipate large-scale changes will be necessary to resolve these points.*

We appreciated this suggestion and have made changes to the beginning and end of the paper. We have added a few sentences to the second paragraph in the introduction, to better introduce the concept of critical reflexivity that we rely on throughout the paper, but which (as helpfully pointed out by Reviewer 2) we had not sufficiently defined or discussed in relation to the extant literature. We return to this at the beginning of the conclusion, where we argue that a rejuvenated, more critical case method can be an important component of critical management education pedagogy.

*c.      The reviewer also alludes to alternative conceptual frameworks that could apply to your argument. We think that it would disturb the flow of your paper to address these alternatives in the main text, but the judicious use of a footnote or two is something that you can consider.*

We have added a brief reference to Argyris and Schön’s theories of action, as suggested by Reviewer 2. It certainly relates to the point made by Turner (1981), that complex theories bear little resemblance to what managers do in practice. However, we decided against delving deeper into this, since we feel Reviewer 2’s point is based on our failure to clearly articulate the connections between the literatures we are engaging with. Our approach in the revision has been to clarify the conceptual links, rather than engage in a deeper examination of debates around actionable knowledge.

**Reviewer 1**

*1. Thank you for revising and resubmitting your paper for the special issue of JME.  I appreciate the detailed response to the reviewer comments provided by the authors.  The revisions removed my previous concerns with the manuscript and left me with a few minor ones.*

We are pleased the revision met with your approval and thank you for the detailed minor comments below.

*2. My first minor concern is in the abstract.  I suggest that you delete the phrase “inspired by a re-examination of Harvard’s response to the turbulence of the 1930s” and replace it with a phrase that more accurately states what your third form actually entails, as defined on page 4 of the manuscript.  For example, “cases that require an engagement with theory to understand management and organizations from multiple perspectives such as managers, employees, customers, unions, not-for-profit organizations, and government.”  I suggest adding the perspective of the natural environment as well to better include all of the Triple Bottom Line.*

We appreciate this suggestion. We deleted the Harvard phrase and replaced it with a version that resembles the one suggested above.

*3. On page 2, line 28, add the year: “and the 2016 election”*

Done.  
  
*4. On page 2, line 35, end of the line, change “This has” to This broadening has”*

Done.  
  
*5. I really like the paragraph at the top of page 4, lines 1-10.  Nicely stated.* 

Thank you.

*6. I also like the sentence in the following paragraph: “They also encourage students to question critically the structures of capitalism, challenging students’ preconceived notions of what the study of management is about.” Is there a way to fit this statement into the abstract?*

Thank you. We have included a version of this sentence in the revised abstract.

*7. On page 6, line 23, I think that instead of the word “reproach,” the manuscript should say “rapprochement.”  Reproach is disapproval. Rapprochement means restoration of harmony.  They are almost antonyms!*

Good point! We have corrected this.

*8. The paragraph ending on line 28 of page 11 is crying out for mention of Nyland, C., Bruce, K., & Burns, P. (2014). Taylorism, the international labour organization, and the genesis and diffusion of codetermination. Organization Studies, 35(8), 1149-1169.  Donham and Whitehead had to be aware that the ILO had lost its funding for because they advocated higher wages and better quality products to end the Great Depression instead of lower wages and planned obsolescence.*

This is an interesting angle, which we considered incorporating but eventually decided not to pursue. Nyland et al (2014) does not mention Donham or Whitehead, and we did not come across in our investigations and archival work any discussion of their opinions on, or response to, the ILO’s loss of funding. Given your suggestion is somewhat speculative and we feel beyond the purposes of our paper, we have decided not to include it in the revision.

*9. Also on page 11, after line 48, it would be helpful to note that the Hawthorne Studies spawned the Human Relations movement which sought to motivate workers WITHOUT increasing their pay.  That is where Wall Street put its money after pulling funding from the ILO (Nyland, et al, 2014).*

As with point 8 above, we gave consideration to entering into this discussion, but decided against it. Nyland et al (2014) paper does not specifically discuss the Hawthorne Studies and we considered that debate to be beyond the boundaries of our paper.

*10. I love the question at the end of the second paragraph on page 12: “So what might a case method grounded in this critical philosophical pedagogy look like in practice?”*

Thank you.

*11. On line 39 of page 12, add the word “just” so the phrase reads, “rather than just for training future managers.”*

Done.

*12. On page 14, line 47/48 I think you should reverse your position: “We do not wish to deny the legitimacy of the neoliberal view,…”  According to Hühn and other business ethicists, the neo-liberal view is neither predictive nor descriptive.  It does not predict which firms will have higher profits nor does it describe the ones that do.  It twists the Williamson’s view of opportunism as something that might occur into a doctrine that everyone is expected to follow, which makes it more of a religious dogma than a theory. I totally agree that this ideological preference has not attracted enough scrutiny.  I much prefer the Triple Bottom Line view that balances profits with people and planet, but that is probably beyond the scope of this paper.  
Hühn, Matthias Philip (2014). You Reap What You Sow: How MBA Programs Undermine Ethics. \_Journal of Business Ethics\_ 121 (4):527-541.*

We appreciate the view expressed here, and have read Hühn’s paper. We found it useful for further grounding our coverage of criticisms of the case method, on page 5. However, we have decided not to shift our position on the legitimacy of the neo-liberal view. As Hühn notes (p.538), “Business schools…should encourage intellectual diversity and not enforce orthodoxy in classrooms, faculties, and journals. A lively debate is the only way any scientiﬁc discipline advances, but a debate needs differences in opinion.” We are wary of replacing one orthodoxy (the neo-liberal view) with another, and want students to understand management and organization from different ideological positions, and to understand the contested nature of management and capitalism. To achieve that, these different positions need to be seen as legitimate, though challengeable, positions to hold.

*13. On page 16, I like the paragraph that starts on line 12, “The case method…” It might be useful to reference Churchman, C. West (December 1967). "Wicked Problems". Management Science. 14 (4). doi:10.1287/mnsc.14.4.B141. Any action taken to resolve a wicked problem can result in making the situation worse, but you have to start somewhere.*  
A useful suggestion. We have added a sentence on wicked problems to the bottom of this paragraph and cited Churchman.

*14. On page 17, line 34 before the conclusion, it might be helpful to mention Benefit Corporations as a legal form.  Benefit Corporations are allowed to distribute assets and profits to anyone they choose, not just shareholders.  Similarly, B Corp Certification (*[*https://www.bcorporation.net/what-are-b-corps/the-b-corp-declaration*](https://www.bcorporation.net/what-are-b-corps/the-b-corp-declaration)*) is a way for organizations to show their commitment to the Triple Bottom line.*  
We did not include a mention in this paragraph, because it deals with cases we have written and taught with and we were not familiar with Benefit Corporations. However, we have mentioned in a revised paragraph on page 20 which incorporates the point below.

*15. I don’t agree with the claim on page 18, line 54 “since theories of learning make it clear that we learn most from failure.”  See Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. American Psychologist, 56(3), 218-226.* [*http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.218*](http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.218)*.  I would argue that cases in which multiple perspective taking resulted in better solutions for multiple stakeholders and for the natural environment are more inspiring than cases in which the neo-liberal view resulted in colossal failure.*

We have removed the unsubstantiated claim that ‘we learn most from failure’ and added a phrase about learning from inspirational cases as well as the importance of adopting multiple perspectives. We did not think the reference to Fredrickson (2001) was necessary to make this point, since it is made by Parker and Parker. We also think that we learn from mistakes, and these can highlight alternative solutions, such as the need for regulation or empowering other stakeholders to act as countervailing forces.

*16. On page 19, I would not hesitate to call existing journals such as Case Research Journal, Journal of Case Studies, and Journal of Case Research to task for this narrow view.  They should change their editorial polices to expect multiple perspective taking.*

We decided not to ‘name and shame’ these journals. If we did name them we would need to substantiate our position in some depth (because the issue is not ‘black and white’) and we are aware we are already at the limits of an acceptable paper length. We did, however, include a reference to previous research (Bridgman, 2010) which included an examination of case journal submission criteria.

*17. I hope you find these suggestions helpful. None of them are in any way a critique of the overall flow of the article or its now much clarified purpose, argument and evidence.*

We found them very helpful. Thank you.

**Reviewer 2**

*This is a review of the revision to the document “Overcoming the problem with solving business problems: Using theory differently to rejuvenate the case method for turbulent times” submitted as a revision to the Journal of Management Education. I will start mentioning that I have read this new version several times because while I consider that there are several aspects that are relevant and important, I am afraid that the whole paper is not as coherent as it can be. I read the paper several times aiming to help the authors improve the paper for this or another journal.   
  
My review is that this is not one but three different papers: The first paper, as featured in the introduction, is a critical perspective that challenges the role of the case method as used in business schools within the contemporary late capitalism environment. The second paper as described in the subtitles “the case method’s relationship with theory” (p.4) and “recovering a critical, reflexive role for theory” (p.9) takes a historical perspective of the evolving views of theory in business schools. To explain, the empirical data features an episode in the development of the case method illustrating the complicated interaction between theory, management, and the case method. Finally, the third paper features how experienced case-writers reflecting on their own experience generate novel ways to write cases. One of those pursuits should be enough for a single publication. I extend the argument in the following lines*

We accept that our most recent revision did not make sufficiently clear the connection between these three aspects of the paper. Following the advice of Professor Hibbert, we have extended the signposting at the front of the paper and made minor changes throughout to demonstrate the thread that connects these aspects.

*The introduction promises a strong rebuttal for the preeminent role of the case method in the context of the fading times of “the neo-liberal order.” With such introduction, I will expect to read the defining characteristics of such economic order, understand the evidence for “the collapse of the neoliberal consensus” including a discussion about whether such consensus exists at all, understand the importance and criticism for the case method, and discuss the alternatives. Instead, the abstract and introduction build a grandiose claim that the rest of the paper fails to deliver. While this angle could be relevant and topical, I do not find evidence in your data that you can actually deliver insights on this matter.*

We highlight briefly the defining aspects of neo-liberalism in the opening paragraph. We believe the recent events of Brexit, Trump and Corbyn (the latter added to the manuscript in this latest revision) is evidence of a deep questioning of a widely held view that there is no realistic alternative to neo-liberalism. This phenomenon is being discussed widely in the scholarly and popular presses, and we feel our claim is appropriate for the ‘essay’ section of this journal, since this is a scene-setter for the paper, rather than being central to our focus.

*The quotes from the main characters in the account – Donham, Griffiths, Whitehead, and Turner – rarely discuss political-economic systems, and instead, the characters focus on the role of managerial theory in management education.* *The historical account of the evolving role of theory in HBS is informative and relevant, focusing on the perspectives that HBS leaders had about what theory is and how theory relates to managerial action. This is a relevant discussion, for sure, but one that seems less related to the fading times of capitalism, and more to Argyris (1996) notion of “actionable knowledge” and “theory in use” and how knowledge and theory are made actionable in organizations (Diaz Ruiz and Holmlund 2017). My point is that with subtitles like “the case method’s relationship with theory” and “recovering a critical, reflexive role for theory,” a reasonable reader would expect that the concepts “theory,” “permissive approach to theory,” and “structured approach to theory” are properly defined and discussed in context of extant literature. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Additionally, while the historical part is quite interesting, it is also difficult to read. It could be useful to have a table introducing the characters, as well as a timeline to understand claims and counterclaims. It could be useful to understand who is who, alternative interpretations of the same timeline, and why existing accounts on the evolution of the case method miss the characters under study.*

Based on your feedback, we have briefly mentioned Argyris and Schön’s theories of action on page 9. We accept that not all our discussion of how the case method has evolved at HBS concerns a critique of capitalism, and we have acknowledged this in our revised conclusion to the paper. However, we do maintain that this was a central concern for Donham and Whitehead, and given the parallels between their times and ours, it was worthwhile considering the possibilities of their experiences informing renewed thinking about the form of the case method. Granted, the debate about the role of theory, between Griffiths, Turner and others was more about the relationship between theory and managerial action. But in advocating a critical, reflexive use of theory, we need to demonstrate the novelty of this by positioning it alongside previous conceptions (the permissive and structured approaches). We hope that our more extensive signposting of the argument throughout the manuscript has clarified these intentions.

*Finally, while the third part of the paper is potentially useful for the rejuvenation of the case method, the section is decontextualized. The reason is that the characters within the historical evidence from the HBS episode didn’t argue explicitly for the same recommendations. To explain, the historical evidence leads to the use of “permissive and structured theory,” as opposed to claims that cases should “challenge the agency of managers” (p.16), or “challenge the desirability and inevitability of neoliberalism” (p.14). None of these recommendations relate to the previous discussion on the use of theory in the case method. Importantly, I acknowledge that one part of the paper discusses how Dorham, Whitehead, and others challenged economics-driven assumptions of how managers should act, like in the anecdote of not firing employees during the recession or encouraging leisure time to foster spending. However, these recommendations are still clearly managerial, thus assume that students will be managers and that firms are important actors operating in a free market. The evidence for the disconnection between empirical data (the historical analysis) and the recommendations is that the authors rely on their experience as case writers instead of historical quotes. I understand that the experience as a case writer is quite valuable, but that would be another paper. To put it a bit bluntly, if the paper is about novel practices based on reflexivity, then the HBS historical recollection seems redundant. In conclusion, while I think that the historical account is interesting and potentially productive, the framing of the paper needs a revision. As it is now, the paper reads like three very different papers. I wish the authors the best of lucks in the revision.*You make a very good point here. We accept that we did not make sufficiently clear the connections between the historical aspects of the paper, and the three recommendations based on our experience. In revising the paper, we have included in the discussion of each recommendation an explicit connection to the historical analysis.