



## Creating the new executive: postwar executive education and socialization into the managerial elite

Rolv Petter Amdam

To cite this article: Rolv Petter Amdam (2020) Creating the new executive: postwar executive education and socialization into the managerial elite, *Management & Organizational History*, 15:2, 106-122, DOI: [10.1080/17449359.2020.1776134](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449359.2020.1776134)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449359.2020.1776134>



© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 08 Jun 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1093



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

# Creating the new executive: postwar executive education and socialization into the managerial elite

Rolv Petter Amdam

Department of Strategy and Entrepreneurship, BI Norwegian Business School, Oslo, Norway

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the development of executive education in the US from 1945 to around 1970, and its function in developing potential top executives' cultural, symbolic, and social capital. The paper shows that postwar executive education was an expression of how the academic community acted according to its societal obligations by offering the new leaders norms and values that could replace what was lost during the transformation to managerial capitalism. This function legitimized executive education within the business schools, which was at the time primarily characterized by a very different logic of scientization.


## KEYWORDS

Executive education; management education; business elites; socialization; social capital; symbolic capital

## Introduction

The period 1945 to 1970 was a formative period for executive education. By executive education we mean full-time non-degree residential business school programs, typically lasting from two to thirteen weeks, with no exam, offered at least annually by a university, recruiting primarily based on management positions and possessing a general management orientation (West 1970, 7). Modern executive education started at Harvard Business School (HBS) when the business school launched its Advanced Management Program (AMP) based on experiences during World War II, a program that soon became the role model for executive education both in the United States and globally (Amdam 2016, 2019). In 1949, there were 333 participants at HBS' AMP and similar programs at other business schools in the United States. In 1960, around 3,000 participated in 39 university executive programs (West 1970, 22).

This paper claims that in order to understand the development and function of executive education in the US in this period, we need to explore executive education as a unique phenomenon based on a different logic from the degree-awarding activities of business schools. It also claims that the emergence of executive education should be understood as a project with an aim to socialize middle managers and potential top executives into the new elite of professional managers. While previous business leaders were embedded in social structures and norms through ownership, the new generation of professional business managers were to a higher degree recruited based on professional criteria and detached from such strong ties.

**CONTACT** Rolv Petter Amdam  [rolv.p.amdam@bi.no](mailto:rolv.p.amdam@bi.no)

© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

In the scholarly literature on the subject, the history of business education in the twentieth century has primarily been told as a story about the development of universities and business schools as degree-granting institutions. According to this narrative, business education at the university level came under strong pressure, starting in the 1950s, to become more academic and to transform itself from a practical to a scientific approach in line with most other academic disciplines. A transformation did indeed take place in the United States as well as in many European countries, and in the period 1945–1970, business education was made more scientific (Engwall, Kipping, and Üsdiken 2016; Locke 1984). This process has been regarded as decisive for business schools in order to be accepted as equal members of the university community. The Ford Foundation played a major role in pushing this change forward by initiating academic studies that legitimized the transformation, as well as by funding several projects in order to strengthen disciplines like mathematics, statistics, organizational behavior, and economics in many of the best American business schools (Augier and March 2011; Gordon and Howell 1959; Pierson 1959).<sup>1</sup>

However, what has been neglected in this broad narrative of post-World War II business education is that the process of scientization of business education marked not only a transformation from a practical approach to an academic one, but also a great divide between two parallel sectors within business education. One sector, which has been the primary focus of historical research to date, led to the rise and development of a series of degree programs, from Bachelor's and Master's degree programs to PhD programs; the other, which from the 1960s began to be labeled 'executive education' in the United States, was a new sector of shorter, non-degree courses that aimed at recruiting participants who were close to top executive positions. This type of program was a major innovation within business education. One of the key actors in developing the executive education sector, the HBS professor of strategy, Kenneth R. Andrews, expressed later that he was very happy of what had been achieved. Based on an empirical study of more than 6,000 AMP participants at several US business schools published in 1966, he concluded that the new sector had been a success and was established as a permanent institution in American education, and 'no responsible voice has been raised in business, academic or public life to challenge the desirability, propriety, or legitimacy of executive education programs as a form of professional education' (Andrews 1966, 185).

This paper addresses the question what did the US business schools offer that created the legitimacy of executive education in this period of transformation of US capitalism, characterized by the growth of the corporations, requiring more managers in number (Drucker 1946), introduction of the M-form, implying new categories of middle- and division managers (Chandler 1977), and the new group of professional managers. The next part of the paper discusses how we can understand the development of executive education in this period as a socialization project by introducing concepts from the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Then, I give a short presentation of the growth of US executive education 1945–1970, before I critically examine who were selected to the programs. The selection mechanisms were part of socialization process. Based on this, I examine the role of executive education in developing cultural, social, and symbolic capital for those who sought top management positions.

The paper draws upon studies of the HBS's archive, Stanford University's (Stanford) archive, the Ford Foundation's archive, and contemporary debates in business and academic journals.<sup>2</sup> Among those who contributed to the contemporary debate was Kenneth

R. Andrews at HBS. No other made empirical studies on US executive programs of similar volume and depth as him in this period (Andrews 1951, 1957a, 1957b, 1959, 1961, 1966, 1969). Therefore, the paper refers to his publications even though he was an actor in executive education himself by teaching at HBS and contributing to the Ford Foundation report on the future of business education (Gordon and Howell 1959) that set the scientification of business schools – called ‘the New Look’ – on the agenda in 1959 together by another report the Pierson report (Pierson 1959). Finally, the paper draws upon a novel written by the wife of one of the participants of HBS’s AMP in 1958, and how she interpreted the week when the wives visited their husbands in Boston, Massachusetts, during the last week of their AMP program (Rodger 1958).

## **Pierre Bourdieu and socialization through business schools**

One way to understand what seems to be a paradoxical expansion of a new nonscientific sector within an institution that was transforming from experiential to academic knowledge (Augier and March 2011) is to define the expansion of executive education as a socialization project of new professional executives. The paper argues that one function of executive education in this period was to develop the cultural, symbolic, and social capital of men who searched for top executive position. This feature of executive education is expressed in the social values and norms that the programs signaled, the content of the programs, and in the participants’ perception of the outcome of the programs.

According to Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977/1990) an educational field produces economic, cultural, symbolic, and social capitals which are exchanged between the actors in the field. In our context, cultural capital means the knowledge and skills that a person has and legitimizes the person’s power. The cultural capital does not only include theories and models that are relevant for executives, but also language and manners that enable the executives to maneuver and gain power within the field. Social capital means the social contacts and networks that emerge during the period of study. Symbolic capital means the prestige that is linked to diplomas and degrees and will vary according to the prestige of the school or the university. Symbolic capital is closely linked to the concept of habitus, which is an outcome of the socialization process. Habitus acts as an internalized system of schemes for perceiving, thinking, and acting within a field. It is a structuring principle for behavior and it reproduces in daily interactions.

The power created through the acquisition of the different forms of capital contributes to reproduce and maintain social positions. However, power is not a stable but a dynamic process, which means that cultural, social, and symbolic capital, which we focus on here, may contribute to increase a person’s power in order to penetrate new levels of hierarchies within a field (Maclean and Harvey 2019). This can be achieved through education, and educational socialization can compensate for the lack of high-status background (Maclean and Harvey 2019; Reay, Crozier, and Clayton 2009). In our case, we address how executive education may have provided different forms of capital to men who searched for – or were selected to – top executive positions, not necessarily CEO positions but positions close to the CEO.

Vaara and Fay (2011) argue that Bourdieu’s concepts of capital are applicable for the understanding of modern MBA education, and that social and symbolic capital have a strong meaning within this field of management education. This argument is also

relevant for executive education in particular, although the field of executive education should be understood as a field different from, but related to, the business school field, as we define as the field of degree-awarding activities of business schools. Business schools and their students are part of the field of executive education, while they also belong to the field of business education. However, the character of executive education makes it more loosely coupled than degree-awarding business education to national institutions that set the rules of the game for higher degree-granting education, institutions that have acted as constraints or moderators in the global homogenization of business education (Amdam 2008; Engwall, Kipping, and Üsdiken 2016; Locke 1984, 1989). Corporations represent the labor market in the field of executive education, as they do in the field of business education. However, their relationship to the educational actors is different. Corporations typically select and receive individual participants in executive programs.<sup>3</sup> Their role is different and more active compared to their role as receivers of graduates that typically would be unknown to them before employment.<sup>4</sup> From a global perspective, the absence of national institutional regulations for executive education creates space for influences from global actors. From a historical postwar perspective, American business schools acted as influential role models in executive education, as they did for degree programs; foundations such as the Ford Foundation tried to develop and change educational institutions globally; the Marshall Plan brought consultants that influenced executive education, and multinational companies entered the new market and contributed to create global standards of executives (Amdam 2019; Engwall, Kipping, and Üsdiken 2016).

## **US executive education, 1945-1970**

In the US, executive education emerged as a part of the transformation of US capitalism as a vision to assist the new professional top executives in defining their role and acting accordingly (Amdam 2016). While previous business leaders were embedded in social structures and norms through ownership, the new professional managers were to a higher degree detached from such strong ties. These new executives needed assistance to grow as actors who could manage the corporation – both manage internally and represent the corporation externally as an institution that was changing in the American society as well as expanding internationally. The idea of developing managers to good people had been clearly stated at HBS already in the 1930s (Engwall, Kipping, and Üsdiken 2016, Chapt. 7; Khurana 2007). Fritz Roethlisberger, one of the creators of the first executive education program, the AMP at HBS, expressed this vision in the context of executive education in the following way: ‘At that time I decided that my goal was not to make persons into better executives but to make executives into better persons’ (Roethlisberger 1977, 112). He also said that HBS originally planned to end the AMP with an exam and give the participants grades but they had to drop that due to resistance from the students.

After both HBS and MIT had made some attempts to create shorter non-degree courses for potential top executives in the 1920s and 1930s, HBS launched a program for executives in the war industry in 1943, and in 1945 this program was designated the Advanced Management Program. Already, in the 1930s, the need to support the new professional manager was used at HBS as the main argument for introducing courses that later were labeled ‘executive education’. The problem with the MBA – which at that time had

developed to become the main educational program at US business schools – was that the students were young and it would take too long for them to reach top positions. Therefore, the business schools needed to reach top executives directly if they were to make any contribution (Amdam 2016). This urgent need was also expressed after the war – for example by the AMP committee at HBS in 1949. In a memorandum on the development of the AMP, the committee said that the ‘principal question’ was that AMP gave HBS ‘an opportunity for immediately affecting the practice of administration where and when it can do the most good’ (i.e., top executive level).<sup>5</sup>

The program at HBS served as the main role model for other executive programs at other universities in the US and globally. The idea of executive education expanded rapidly to other universities in the 1950s. In 1951, six US universities offered executive programs, including HBS, MIT, Northwestern, and Wharton, and from 1952 to 1958, 39 new programs were added in the US (West 1970, 17–18). In 1949, there were 333 participants at HBS’s AMP and similar programs at other business schools; in 1953, there were 1,000 participants, and more than 2,000 in 1957, of whom 15% attended HBS’s AMP.<sup>6</sup> From 1948 to 1958, nearly 10,000 executives participated in 39 university executive programs. In the early 1960s, annually 3,000 participated in executive programs the US and Canada (West 1970, 22). In the 1960s, however, the number of new universities that offered executive education programs slowed down. According to a survey from 1968, ten new universities had entered the arena since 1958 at the same time as some were closed down, a trend that strengthened the impression that successful executive education was linked to the most prestigious university business schools (West 1970, 19). At HBS, the AMP was a thirteen-week intensive on-campus program in management with 150 participants who lived together in a university hall. They were organized in groups (‘cans’) of eight according to how they lived so they could prepare the next case in the evening after they had finished the class. Most of the other executive programs were shorter. In 1968, 38 out of 42 executive programs in the US were from two to six weeks (West 1970, 93–94). Average age was 40–45 years and 50–80% had a college degree, varying from one program to another.<sup>7</sup>

In this period, executive education programs were programs with individuals from several corporations in the same class, but parallel to this process the idea of corporate executive training developed. With limited exceptions, few corporations offered executive training before World War II, but after the war the numbers exploded. According to surveys from the National Industrial Conference Board and American Management Association, only three percent of 2,500 companies had an ‘executive training program’ in 1935, while similar programs were offered by 30% of 2,000 firms in 1952 (Bridgeman 1959, 539). Some of these new postwar corporate programs were spin-offs from business school programs, such as AT&T’s four-week management program for all department heads from 1953, and a similar program at the Bell System (Andrews 1957b, 65, 1966, 36). In some cases, business school professors taught this kind of corporate executive program in parallel with a business school program. For example, Kenneth R. Andrews at HBS was heavily involved in the development of GE’s management development institute, Crotonville, which opened with a thirteen-week executive program in 1956 (Tichy 1989). Half of the faculty comprised executives from GE; the rest were business school professors ‘like in more and more companies’, a newspaper reported in 1958 (Times 1958).

## The socialization of men

Executive education was from the very beginning a project only for men. From 1937, Radcliffe College at Harvard University had offered a training program in personnel administration for women. This course led to the one-year Harvard-Radcliffe Program in Business Administration for women from 1956, and from 1959, the graduates from this program might apply for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year at the MBA program. Some did, and in 1963, women were accepted as ordinary MBA students. At that time, one woman had been accepted as an AMP participant in September 1962 (HBS Bulletin 1963). Also Stanford Graduate School of Business' executive program was 'designed for men between the age of 35 and 50 with successful records of management responsibility.'<sup>8</sup> In 1962, Miss Grace M. Wallis, an Oakland attorney, was accepted as the first woman in the program, and the program director, Robert T. David said 'there was only slight hesitation over Miss Wallis application when it arrived.'<sup>9</sup> In the late 1960s, women were formally allowed to attend executive education at most universities. Among 44 executive programs listed in an inventory of executive education in 1969, only five said that they did not accept women and five did not give any information on this. The five programs that did not accept women were two programs at Northwestern University, two at Pennsylvania State University and one at the University of Iowa (McNulty 1969, 558–568). In reality, however, few women attended. At Stanford, there only two among 184 participants as late as in 1975.<sup>10</sup>

Women hardly attended the executive programs, but still they had core positions in the socialization project, as their men's wives. The 1968-yearbook from Stanford's executive program, six years after the first woman was admitted, pictured and named all participants. All of them were men. It also showed 'The girls we left behind', a picture of all the wives who visited Stanford the last week of the program and who now were dressed for party.<sup>11</sup> The week of the wives, at Harvard, Stanford and other places, were, however, more than a reunion between men and their wives who had missed each other after some weeks of training. It was primarily a part of the socialization project that their men went through.

In the mind-set of the business schools, corporations and participants, the women had a place in the big picture of executive education as supporting wives. At HBS, the wives were socialized into the executive culture through special lectures such as on 'The Care and Feeding of your Executive Husband', museum visits, and cocktail parties. When the editor of the business magazine, *Nation's Business*, Walter Wingo, reported from the week of the wives, and told about the receptions, parties, and tours of historic spots in Boston during the week, he said: 'But it's not all play' (Wingo 1967, 136). It was not only a play, because the wives were also given small business cases that they had to present 'modeled after the regular sessions', attend lectures, and listen to their husbands' presentations of the summarizing 'Big Case' they had been working on the last week, sitting side-by-side with top officials from the company that were studied in the cases. The wives were literally in the same room when their husband should show the result of a process of being socialized into a position of a top-executive, a position that not only required the skills to manage business operations, but also included his ability to socialize his wife into this world. Women should not only understand what their men had been doing during the last weeks but also support their journey into the new elite of professional managers in US business. They should share the men's new identity and be a partner who could add to his cultural, social, and symbolic capital.

## The selected men

Men were selected to executive programs to fill executive positions that had increased in number due to the professionalization of management combined with demographic factors. In his paper from 1952, 'Executives are made not born', Peter Drucker argued that not only were the new generation of top executives of a new kind with no ties to the owners. Management jobs had also become more complex, decisions had changed to be made for a longer and longer time ahead, and most of the new executives had climbed within the corporation as specialists and needed to become generalists. In addition, executives had become older after the war, around 60, which meant a shortage of young executives (Drucker 1952). This observation of an increase in the average age of the top executives is supported by Mabel Newcomer in her study of top executives and board members in large American corporations in the first half of the twentieth century (Newcomer 1955, table, 4).

In most cases, the companies selected the participants to the executive programs, not the business schools. A survey revealed that 87% of the participants were approached by the top management of their organization (Andrews 1961, 119). Unlike an MBA program, enrollment was not based on any undergraduate degree, any other exam, grade, or entrance test, but on the hierarchical position within the organizations that sent the participants. Formally, the school and the company selected the participants together, but often it was the firm that had the last word based on the candidate's potential as an executive (Gorsuch 1963, 58). The process was more flexible than formal (Moser 1957, 13). It was a selection process where top executives of a firm selected men who could replace them or work together with them in the top executive group in the near future. The top managers were 'in a better position to select men to attend executive development courses than are outsiders such as program administrators', an observer reported, and 'the program administrators, for obvious reasons, tend[ed] to respect this attitude' (Anshen 1955, 68).

At HBS, the intention was from the very beginning to recruit top executives or potential top executives, or as a report in 1949 stated:

[Admission] should be restricted to the executive who has been definitively marked for advancement to higher level of administrative responsibility, or who, having reached the top, can make good use of the kind of broadening this management program provides.<sup>12</sup>

However, there were some concerns as to whether or not this aim was reached. In 1954, HBS launched a new executive program for middle managers, the Program for Management Development (PMD), as an offer for younger managers who did not fulfil the requirement of being in – or close to – a top executive position. Originally, this program lasted for a year and a half in order to underline the difference from the thirteen-week AMP. After graduation, the participants could also be accepted to the second year of the MBA program and gain a degree. However, the length of the program was not a success, and during the first part of the 1960s it was reduced to fifteen weeks.<sup>13</sup> At that time, it was generally understood among faculty members that the AMP had recently developed from a program for lower middle managers in the late 1940s to middle managers in the 1950s when the PMD was launched, and now to top managers in the early 1960s.<sup>14</sup>



HBS and other US business schools managed to recruit a relative large number of top executives to their programs, even from some of the largest companies in the US. In 1949, Standard Oil sent 23 men to HBS's AMP. Four of them were general managers and seven were department managers. Most of them worked in the US, but there were also participants who worked in Denmark, Belgium, Venezuela, Aruba, and Peru.<sup>15</sup> Among 152 participants in one of the 1966 classes, 100 were US businessmen who were presidents, functional department heads, general managers of profit centers, or their staff equivalents. Thirty were from outside the US, and the remainder from the US government, military, or civilians (Wingo 1967, 4). At the national level, top executives were fewer, but still many. According to Andrew's survey, 38% were managers in senior line and staff positions (e.g., board members, division presidents, and secretary to the corporation's president), and 41% were functional department heads (Andrews 1961, 118).

The most prestigious business schools attracted most participants from the largest companies to their executive programs as HBS and a few other prestigious business schools. A survey from 1963 shows that the business schools at Columbia University, Northwestern University and MIT had more participants from Fortune 100 and 500 companies than HBS which followed after the three mentioned business schools. The firms tended to choose program based on old networks to the university, which favored prestigious universities. In the case of HBS, this meant that companies such as Westinghouse, US Steel, Standard Oil Company (N.J.), AT&T, and Texaco preferred HBS. Other companies with traditional strong relationships with Harvard University, such as Shell and Otis Elevator, chose in the 1960s to establish their corporate programs for executives, which was used internally at HBS to explain why Northwestern Columbia, and MIT attracted more from Fortune 100 and 500 than HBS.<sup>16</sup>

## The cultural capital of executive education

One kind of cultural capital a top-executive needed to gain power within the field was the practical experiences and academic knowledge he could draw upon in his business work, as well as a language to express this to the stakeholders. The need for this kind of qualification was a driving force for the educators, or as one HBS professors said: '[...] because of the tremendous impact that the top executive has on society, we have a responsibility to do something with any extraordinary group of hand-picked men whom we know will be leaders' (HBS Bulletin, 1958, 11). Harwood F. Merrill, the President of HBS alumni association, expressed this responsibility when summarizing a conference with business leaders on the topic: 'If [a business leader] acts toward others as he would want them to act toward him, then he will be on the right road toward discharging his business responsibilities' (Merrill 1949, vii).

Many participants of postwar executive education programs expressed the value of being introduced to a broader perspective that aimed at increasing the cultural capital when they reported back after finishing a program. The 1963-yearbook of Stanford's executive program ending by highlighting a process that had 'created lasting friendship, broader perspectives, widening horizon, and businessmen more aware of their role in the world.'<sup>17</sup> In the novel. *The Week of the Wives*, the assistant dean, Dr. Henry Crane, talked about the outcome of five thousand who had 'surged through this Program strait into the bloodstream of American business':

The wonderful thing about it is that so many have told us, both personally and in letters, that they have left us with a changed and broadened viewpoint, with a new appreciation of the responsibilities of their business leadership (Rodger 1958, 95).

Regarding the formal content of executive education in the US in this period, the scientization wave that swept over American business schools in order to make the business schools more academic and acceptable by the university system (Augier and March 2011), reached the executive education sector very gently. Executive education was dominated by courses that addressed practical challenges related to the behavioral and societal role of the executive. At HBS, the first AMP was composed of six courses (Administrative Practice, Business Policy, Business and the World Society, Cost and Financial Administration, Labor Relations, and Marketing). There were minor changes over time, but the main trend was not toward quantitative academic disciplines, but toward international business, social and political issues, and strategy in order to strengthen 'the organic whole' of the program.<sup>18</sup> One result of this process was that HBS offered business history as an elective from 1961, and from 1963–64 as one out of seven mandatory courses in the AMP.<sup>19</sup> Morton Backer, a professor of accounting at New York University, was one of very few who explicitly addressed the question of quantitative courses in executive programs in a paper on how to develop an accounting course in such programs. However, he warned other professors about becoming too advanced when lecturing on quantitative topics:

Since the executive development program is concerned only with the uses of quantitative data as a basis for controls and decision-making, the instructor should avoid in-depth discussions of the more technical aspects of the disciplines involved (Backer 1961, 217).

Some universities other than Harvard introduced shorter courses in quantitative and statistical methods, in some cases as electives, in their executive programs. In 1968, less than 50% of those programs that had been established before 1958 had introduced this element, but the tendency was increasing (West 1970, 86–87). One university that actually introduced a quantitative course (Quantitative and statistical methods) in its AMP program in the 1960s was Northwestern University. In 1974, the participants from 1967, 1968, and 1969 were asked in a survey which course had made an impact on them. While the average score for all courses was 2.6, the quantitative course had the lowest score, at only 1.7 (Crotty 1974: table, 4).

More important than the disciplines was the dominating principle of case teaching, which made the participants active through the program. By living together and solving assignments together they developed a common language to express their knowledge, and to legitimize their future corporate decisions and increase power in the corporate hierarchies.

### **Symbolic capital and executive education**

The selection process, discussed above, contributed to increase the power of the participants since it signaled to the colleagues in the corporation that top management believed a top management career for the chosen man. *The Week of the Wives* brings the reader into this symbolic dimension and socialization aspect of executive education. The novel emphasizes that the men who attended the AMP were the chosen ones. Camilla, Rick's wife, explained why Rick attended the AMP:

Men in American Electric, as in most of the big companies, had no choice when they were tapped for an Advanced Management course; they went when they were called (Rodger 1958, 9).

The participants were chosen. Those who were selected perceived the selection as a signal for promotion and those who were not selected understood this signaling effect. Professor Andrews noticed that the rivals of the selected 'may interpret selection as equivalent to crown princedom' (Andrews 1957b).

The selection process was a socialization process, not only into a corporate elite position, but also into the corporate elite's expectations and norms. It was a process that not only aimed at creating the new professional top executive according to the firm's expectations, but also his wife's attitude, or, as Grace said about the week of the wives, it was 'valuable training for a company wife, don't you agree?' (Rodger 1958, 35). In this process, the corporations not only made a selection of potential top executives: they also controlled that the participants behaved according to their norms when they were outside the firm to attend the program for many weeks, or, as one wife reflected:

She meant to give her most polished performance of the role of Company Wife this week. Rock knew, and she knew, that all sorts of details of the 39<sup>th</sup> Class graduation would reach the collective ears of American Electric almost before the last diploma was awarded. So far, Rick's record was perfect (Rodger 1958, 17).

The role of the business school was to do the screening. Phil said: 'You see, Harvard – and, I imagine, the other universities who give similar courses – does a careful screening job' (Rodger 1958, 48). The business schools also provided symbols, especially HBS, which was regarded as so prestigious that most of the other business schools had to relate to that business school (Berman and Wall 1983). Kenneth Andrews, in his contribution to the Pierson report on the future development of management education, was fully aware of this symbolic effect and the danger that executive education could develop into a fad. Sending men to executive programs could change from being an action for developing new top executives to a symbolic ritual:

When, as has happened, the president of a company in an industry well known for its participation in university programs finds himself embarrassed by reporting that he is not taking part by sending men, he is responding to newly established expectations. When a dean reports that he is 'sorry to say' that he has no executive programs, he acknowledges a norm (Andrews 1959, 587).

Although Andrews, as mentioned, was a key actor in the formative period of executive education, and might have been a bit biased in his evaluations, the quote gives an indication of institutionalization of executive education in the US with a norm that corporations ought to send their potential managers to executive programs and business schools should have such programs in their portfolio (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

## **Social capital and the content of executive education**

In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, various content analyses of the US business schools' executive programs were published. Obviously, there were some variations between different universities in terms of content, profile, and length, with most of the programs

lasting from two to eight weeks. However, most of all, the observers were struck by the similarities between the programs. According to Andrews, these similarities were caused by 'a common perception of a clearly defined need felt in the top levels of company management', and by the strong influence of the schools upon each other, and this was expressed in 'stylized rituals of stating purposes' (Andrews 1959, 587). These observations strengthen the impression of a broader societal movement deeply anchored in a societal transformation.

One of the first comparative studies of the new executive education programs was made by Ivarson and Planty (1957). Based on studies of twelve programs, they highlighted the development of a better understanding of the social, political, and economic influences of executive decisions, as well as the understanding of human problems in the company and the interaction between different functions in the company, as typical for all these executive programs (Ivarson and Planty 1957, 1). A survey of 32 universities conducted by the National Industry Conference Board from the same year highlighted three features that characterized the object and content of the programs: firstly, to broaden the outlook of the individual; secondly, to teach the executive to think through the problems that confront him on the job; and finally, to make the executive more efficient in his present job and increase his ability to handle higher-level jobs later on (West 1970, 20). Especially, the study highlighted three characteristics: 1) making generalists out of specialists, 2) broadening the outlook of the individual, and 3) improving decision-making processes.

These characteristics were derived from the stated objectives of the programs and from studying the profile and content of the different courses, but also – and not least – from the pedagogical philosophy behind the programs, strongly dominated as they were by case teaching and other methods that aimed at involving participants in processes with a high degree of active participation. If we also consider the low impact of courses that represented the New Look, such as mathematic, statistics, and economics, the development of the content of the programs did not represent any radical change from experiential to academic knowledge, which according to Augier and March (2011) was one of the main characteristics of the scientization of business education from the 1950s.

Another way to approach the question of the content is to address the question of what the participants perceived as the learning outcome from the programs. Executive education was a big innovation in business education and led to several surveys and reports on what the participants learned. They all confirmed that it was not primarily new factual knowledge that was the focus of the participants, or, as one executive at Westinghouse Electrical Corporation said having attended an executive program: 'This course taught [me] you can't make up your mind merely from a set of facts' (Andrews 1957a, 91). The programs were arenas for the exchange of ideas and experiences, where the participants were socialized into common norms with the professor as 'a traffic officer' to keep the flow of arguments and ideas in some coherent form', as one participant reported to his boss.<sup>20</sup> Professor Andrews reported that the participants were 'interested least in the functions and most in the general subjects'. The participants found that what they learned broadened their thinking – 'their own attitudes and prejudices were modified toward tolerance and humility' – and they gained greater respect for their own ability to manage, returning to their jobs with greater confidence in themselves (Andrews 1961, 131–133).

The executive programs were organized as intense events from early in the morning to late evening. When the classes ended in the evening, the participants went back to the

halls where they had to live during the weeks to do group work and prepare for the next day. At HBS, these groups of eight were called 'can' groups and were organized according to how their rooms were grouped together. This organization created close ties between participants. Therefore, one observer noted about the participants, 'in daytime classes and nighttime bull sessions, his thinking is challenged, prodded, stimulated, exercised, and broadened' (Anshen 1954, 85). One interesting finding from one of the surveys confirms that the core of the content is not to be found primarily in the formal description of the curriculum, but in the social interaction between participants sharing knowledge and experiences, the meaning of new personal networks. Networks between the men emerged due to the intensity of work, the way of living, as well as organized social activities during the weeks, such as in the case of Stanford's executive program golf tournament, table tennis tournaments, weekend trips to Lake Tahoe and cocktail parties. The 1964 yearbook from Stanford used this text as heading to several pages of pictures from social activities:

We assessed each study case ... but how to assess ... eight week of life, labor ... training, training ... comradeship, friendship ... teamwork and effort ... by sixty-nine men from all walks of business life.<sup>21</sup>

In the case of the 1973 executive class at Stanford, the networks were so strong that the men – with their wives – met regularly and from 1987 to 2011 organized biennial reunion in places such as Helsinki, Antwerp, Japan, Cape Town and Loire in France.<sup>22</sup>

Several surveys confirm the importance of the new networks from the executive programs. A comparative survey of MBA students and of executive development program participants from 1967–1969 at Northwestern University on their perception in 1974 of the career effect of the programs shows that 26.5 percent of the executive program students said that the program had 'provided valuable peer contact', while only 2.1 percent of the MBA graduates said the same (Crotty 1974: table, 10). Ten years later, the same population was asked the same question, and the results were 21.3% for the executive students and 2.9% for the MBA (Crotty 1985, table, 9).

Most of the participants were very happy after attending executive programs. According to Andrews' survey, more than 82% evaluated their attendance favorably (Andrews 1961, 121). However, what appears to be a paradox is that the same survey shows that there was almost no mobility in the organization after the participants returned to their corporation, at least in a one-to-two year perspective (Andrews 1961, 128; Berman and Wall 1983, 20). From a long-term perspective, however, the effects seem to be stronger. Among the participants at Northwestern in 1967–1969, 25% of the participants in the executive classes were upper level managers when they finished the program. After ten years, this percentage had increased to 61%. In the same ten-year period, the percentage of MBA graduates from the same business schools had increased from zero to only 23 (Crotty 1985, 31). Another survey shows that after 15 years, participants in HBS's AMP earned almost a third more on average than those with an MBA (Livingstone [1971] 1985). The latter group, however, were younger and the trends therefore uncertain.

What could explain the apparent paradox between the strong enthusiasm upon completing an executive program and what might have been a weaker promotion progress than expected is that the program's function as a tool for career promotion was overshadowed by another function, the function of socializing men who were already

chosen for higher positions into the norms of the new group of professional executives. The executive programs were approached by corporations and executives that felt that 'adult education is 'in the air'; a feeling among executives that 'if others are doing it I had better go along', as one observer reported (Low 1958, 190). The outcome was measured according to how the participants were able to adjust to the norms of the professional executive. Melvin Anshen, who was one of the first scholars to try to analyze the new executive programs, said that 'the greatest contribution of the better programs' was the opportunity they offered an executive 'to rub his mind against the minds of the executives from other industries, companies, functions, and places' (Anshen 1954, 85). Internally at HBS, this socialization process was already observed in the infancy of the new executive program:

For many, however, a great deal seems to happen. It is clearly not so much that they acquire an additional body of factual information; specialists are not made better specialists. Over the years, we have accumulated statements from many different men undertaking to describe what happened to them. Almost always such comments are expressed in terms of mental habits, an increase in open-mindedness, in the willingness and ability to understand other men's problem and other men's points of view.<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

Executive education, as it developed in US business schools after World War II, was one of the major innovations in modern higher education. At the same time that US business schools were investing heavily in making their degree programs more scientific in order to be accepted by the rest of the university community, US business schools developed a new sector, executive education, that was based on a totally different logic. Enrollment was based on hierarchical positions in the firms. In reality, top executives of the enterprises selected the participants, not the business schools. There were no exams and no grading, and the programs were not (with some exceptions) involved in the bigger transformation to make business education more academic.

More than offering the participants any analytical tools or new research-based factual knowledge, executive education was an arena wherein new executives were socialized into the norms of the executive, and this function legitimized its birth and development, totally contrary to the development of the traditional degree-awarding sector of business education. Postwar executive education was an expression of how the academic community acted according to its societal obligations by offering the new leaders norms and values that could replace what was lost during the managerial revolution. The programs aimed at preparing the executive and developing the confidence to manage the enterprise internally, but they also aimed at developing the executives' social obligations as key actors who would develop capitalism to the benefit of the society.

The paper analyses the development of executive education as a socialization process by using Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural, social, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977/1990). Vaara and Fay (2011) show the relevance of bringing social and symbolic capital into studies of MBA education, and argue that the success of this education is a result especially of the function of business schools offering symbolic capital. This paper shows that in the case of executive education, different forms of capital

mattered. The value of cultural capital exceeded new knowledge about models and theories, and included the introduction to the language and manners of top executives, or in other words the concepts and rhetoric they used in discussions in managerial settings. The value of symbolic capital was expressed not only by diplomas from prestigious universities but also by the signaling effect of being chosen by top management to participate. Social capital was most of all acquired by participants when they created new social networks with other participants across corporate borders.

The study also touches upon three topics that should be explored in further research. The first topic is the long-term value of this new capital after the participant finished their executive education programs. A study of the career of participants could reveal the character of the habitus as schemes of perceiving, thinking and acting, and show if the new capital really increased the participants' power to climb to the top of corporate hierarchies. Secondly, the way the wives were treated in a broader context of executive education programs calls for critical research on women and executive education. The paper suggests that our understanding of women as excluded from the programs should be nuanced by an interpretation that they were included in a broader setting to support the socialization of men into executive positions. Finally, in this period, the US concept of executive education also expanded internationally, and were set up in countries such as Algeria, Chile, France, India, Japan, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom (Amdam 2019). A topic for further study is to address what implications the interpretation of the emergence of executive education in the US as a socialization process has for how we understand the global diffusion and development of executive education.

## Notes

1. See also J. Wheeler, Report to Ford Foundation on Changes in Collegiate Business Education in the United States 1954–64 and the Role of the Ford Foundation in These Changes, draft September 1965, box 21, folder 4993, FF/FA739b.
2. The paper refers to archive series at the Ford Foundation's archives at the Rockefeller Archives Center, NY, Harvard Business School's Archive in the Baker Library's historical collection, Boston, and Stanford University's archives in Palo Alto. Helpful archivists at these archives have made this study possible. I have used the following abbreviations: For the series at the Ford Foundation's archives: FF/FA739b. For Harvard Business School's archives: HBS/Andrews (Kenneth R. Andrews papers), HBS/E25A.10 (Executive Education: Advanced Management Program), HBS/E25A.10.1. (Executive Education: AMP), HBS/25B.1 (Executive Education: printed Material 1927-), and HBS/Vertical (Vertical files, C1947.38-AC1956.12), For Stanford University's archives: Stanford/SC112 (Stanford University News Service Series 1) and Stanford/SC1266 (Stanford University, Graduate School of Business).
3. Especially from the 1990 s, executive education split into programs' similar to the programs in this period and a new form of tailor-made program for corporations.
4. Executive MBA programs are between the two: they recruit managers who often have a management position in a firm when they study, and they get a degree. In this paper, EMBA is not defined as part of executive education.
5. Memorandum April 25, 1949, Subcommittee on the Advanced Management to G. P. Baker, Box 63, The effectiveness of university management development programs, HBS/Andrews.
6. John D. Glover to Dean Baker, Background data related to the Advanced Management Program, 21 March 1963, carton 23, Background data 1964, HBS/E25A.10.

7. For detailed information about content, length, average age and background of all executive programs in 1968, see McNulty (1969).
8. Stanford University News Service, 27 June 1962, box 70, Graduate School of Business, Executive Programs 1952–69, Stanford/SC112.
9. Ibid.
10. Stanford Graduate School of Business Executive Programs 1975, Yearbook, box 19, Stanford/SC1266.
11. 1968 Stanford Executive Program, Yearbook, box 19, Stanford/SC1266.
12. Memo from Committee on Educational Policy to Faculty, 19 May 1949, box 62, The effectiveness of university management development program, misc. 1, HBS/Andrews.
13. Management programs at Harvard Business School, brochure, box 1, Management programs 1965–66, HBS/E25B.1.
14. John D. Glover, Report on the Advanced Management Program, April 12, carton 23, AMP Position papers, HBS/E25A.10.
15. Nominees for the fourteenth session of Harvard's Advanced Management Program, Standard Oil (NJ), box 31, Company correspondence: Standard Oil (NJ) and subsidiaries 1963, HBS/E25A.10.1.
16. John D. Glover to Dean Baker, Background data related to the Advanced Management Program, 21 March 1963, carton 23, Background data, HBS/E25A.10.
17. Incredible, Yearbook 1963, box 19, Stanford/SC1266.
18. John D. Glover, Subject report on the Advanced Management Program, with Suggestions for 1964–12 April 1969, 1963, carton 23, AMP Position papers, HBS/E25A.10.
19. Advanced Management Program Catalog 1963–64, box 3, PM 1927-, HBS/E25B.1.
20. NN to L. P. McCollum, 24 February 1954, box 62, The effectiveness of university management development programs, 1955–57, HBS/Andrews.
21. However. Yearbook 1964, box 19, Stanford/SC1266.
22. 40 years of memory, box 19, Stanford/SC1266.
23. Stanley Teele, Report on the HBS at the Great Lakes Business Conference, 7 April 1951, box 8, AC1951.75. Teele, Stanley, HBS/Vertical.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

**Rolv Petter Amdam** is Professor of Business History at BI Norwegian Business School and was in 2015 (fall) the Alfred D. Chandler International Visiting Scholar in Business History at Harvard Business School. In 2017 (fall) he was SCANCOR Visiting Fellow, at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Oslo on a study on the history of business education in Norway. He is currently doing research on the global development of executive education since 1945. He has published in journals such as *Business History Review*, *Business History*, and *Management & Organizational History*

## References

- Amdam, R. P. 2008. "Business Education." In *The Oxford Handbook in Business History*, edited by G. Jones and J. Zeitlin, 581–602. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Amdam, R. P. 2016. "Executive Education and the Managerial Revolution: The Birth of Executive Education at Harvard Business School." *Business History Review* 90 (4): 671–690. doi:10.1017/S0007680517000010.



- Amdam, R. P. 2019. "The Internationalization of Executive Education, 1945-1970." In *The Routledge Companion to the Makers of Global Business*, edited by T. D. S. Lopez, C. Lubinski, and H. Tworek, 125-137. London: Routledge.
- Andrews, K. R. 1951. "Executive Training by the Case Method." *Harvard Business Review* 29 (5): 58-70.
- Andrews, K. R. 1957a. "Is Management Training Effective? 1. Evaluation by Managers and Instructors." *Harvard Business Review* 35 (1): 85-94.
- Andrews, K. R. 1957b. "Is Management Training Effective? 2. Measurement, Objectives, and Policy." *Harvard Business Review* 35 (2): 63-72.
- Andrews, K. R. 1959. "University Programs for Practicing Executives in F." In *The Education of American Business: A Study of University-College Programs in Business Administration*, edited by C. Pierson, 577-608. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Andrews, K. R. 1961. "Reaction to University Development Programs." *Harvard Business Review* 39 (3): 116-134.
- Andrews, K. R. 1966. *The Effectiveness of University Management Development Programs*. Boston: Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University.
- Andrews, K. R. 1969. "Toward Professionalism in Business Management." *Harvard Business Review* 47 (2): 49-60.
- Anshen, M. 1954. "Executive Development: In-Company Vs. University Programs." *Harvard Business Review* 32 (5): 83.
- Anshen, M. 1955. "Better Use of Executive Development Programs." *Harvard Business Review* 33 (6): 67-74.
- Augier, M., and J. G. March. 2011. *The Roots, Rituals, and Rethoric of Change: North American Business Schools after the Second World War*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Backer, M. 1961. "The Quantitative Data Course in the Executive Development Program." *Accounting Review* 36 (2): 217.
- Berman, J., and S. J. Wall. 1983. "The Harvard AMP after 40 Years." *Journal of European Industrial Training* 7 (7): 17-21. doi:10.1108/eb002162.
- Bourdieu, P., and J. C. Passeron. 1977/1990. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: Sage.
- Bridgeman, D. S. 1959. "Company Management Development Programs in F." In *The Education of American Business: A Study of University-College Programs in Business Administration*, edited by C. Pierson, 536-576. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Chandler, A. D. J. 1977. *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Crotty, P. 1985. "A Decade Later: Continuing Education and the Experienced Manager." *Human Resource Planning* 8 (1): 29-47.
- Crotty, P. T. 1974. "Continuing Education and the Experienced Manager." *California Management Review* 17 (1): 108-123. doi:10.2307/41164550.
- DiMaggio, P. J., and W. W. Powell. 1983. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields." *American Sociological Review* 48 (2): 147-160. doi:10.2307/2095101.
- Drucker, P. F. 1946. *Concept of the Corporation*. New York: John Day.
- Drucker, P. F. 1952. "Executives are Made Not Born." *Nation's Business* 40 (10): 34-37.
- Engwall, L., M. Kipping, and B. Üsdiken. 2016. *Defining Management: Business Schools, Consultants, Media*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Gordon, R. A., and J. E. Howell. 1959. *Higher Education for Business*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gorsuch, J. H. 1963. "Executive Growth: Making Better Use of University Programs." *Business Horizons* 6 (Spring): 57-62. doi:10.1016/0007-6813(63)90085-5.
- HBS Bulletin. 1963. "New Opportunities for Women in the Business School." *Harvard Business School Bulletin* 39: 1.
- HBS Bulletin. 1958. "Where do we go from here?." *Harvard Business School Bulletin*, 34, (2)
- Ivarson, J. R., and E. G. Planty. 1957. *An Analysis of Twelve University Executive Development Programs*. Campaign, Ill: Management Publications.

- Khurana, R. 2007. *From Higher Aims to Hired Hands: The Social Transformation of American Business Schools and the Unfulfilled Promise of Management as a Profession*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Livingstone, J. S. [1971] 1985. "Myth of the Well-educated Manager." In *Harvard Business Review: Essentials of Executive Education*, 91–101. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review.
- Locke, R. R. 1984. *The End of the Practical Man: Entrepreneurship and Higher Education in Germany, France, and Great Britain, 1880-1940*. Greenwich & London: JAI Press.
- Locke, R. R. 1989. *Management and Higher Education since 1940*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Low, R. E. 1958. "Training outside the Company." In *Developing Executive Skills: New Patterns for Management Growth*, edited by H. F. Merrill and E. Marting, 190–198. New York: American Management Association.
- Maclean, M., and C. Harvey. 2019. "Pierre Bourdieu and Elites: Making the Hidden Visible." In *Management, Organizations and Contemporary Social Theory*, edited by S. Clegg and M. P. E. Cunha, 98–114. London: Routledge.
- McNulty, N. G. 1969. *Training Managers: The International Guide*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Merrill, H. F., ed. 1949. *The Responsibilities of Business Leadership*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Moser, G. V. 1957. *Executive Development Courses in Universities: Studies in Personnel Policy, No. 160*. New York: National Industrial Conference Board.
- Newcomer, M. 1955. *Big Business Executives: The Factors that Made Him, 1900-1950*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Pierson, F. C. 1959. *The Education of American Businessmen: A Study of University-College Programs in Business Administration*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Reay, D., G. Crozier, and J. Clayton. 2009. "'Strangers in Paradise?': Working-class Students in Elite Universities." *Sociology* 43 (6): 1103–1121. doi:10.1177/0038038509345700.
- Rodger, S.-E. 1958. *The Week of the Wives*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Roethlisberger, F. J. 1977. *The Elusive Phenomena: An Autobiographical Account of My Work in the Field of Organizational Behavior at the Harvard Business School*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Tichy, N. M. 1989. "GE's Crotonville: A Staging Ground for Corporate Revolution." *Academy of Management Executive* 3 (2): 99–106.
- Times. 1958. "Schools for Executives. How Helpful Is Industry's New Fad?" *Times*, January, 6.
- Vaara, E., and E. Fay. 2011. "How Can a Bourdieusian Perspective Aid Analysis of MBA Education?" *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 10 (1): 27–39. doi:10.5465/amle.10.1.zqr27.
- West, J. P. 1970. "A Comparative Analysis of University Executive Development Programs Conducted in 1958 and 1968." PhD dissertation, University of Iowa.
- Wingo, W. 1967. *Pattern for Success: Presenting the Harvard Business School Advanced Management Program*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company.