

Look to the Puritans, not business schools

- by [Simon Caulkin](#), management editor
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In their bold, original and agreeably opinionated *The Puritan Gift*, brothers Will and Kenneth Hopper argue that up to the 1970s, US management (which the British gamely follows at one remove) was living on the strength of its Puritan inheritance, part of which (with idealism, mechanical aptitudes and unparalleled ability to galvanise energy behind a single aim) was a belief that the coherence of the collective was more important than any individual.

But the obverse of US willingness to live in the present is the ease with which it forgets its past. Managers abandoned true north in favour of "neo-Taylorism" - quantitative techniques, "the cult of the expert", of which the temples were business schools, and heroic CEOs. Raging self-interest and the malign influence of shareholder value did the rest; as it did in the UK, where, lacking their own tradition and burdened by inferiority complex, UK managers were all too easy to drag in the same direction.

The Hoppers end on a note of qualified optimism. Just as the French had to go to the US to reintroduce resistant vines after their own had been wiped out by phylloxera, so the most thoughtful Anglo-US firms are relearning what they once knew from Japan, inheritor of the human-centred US tradition via Deming and others after the war.

The crunch reinforces the urgency of renewal, as does the scandal of MPs' expenses, both egregious management failures that focus the plight and the fury of the TUC's "sinking" middle. A new tax and mobility agenda is the TUC's remedy; returning management to its virtuous roots would do more.

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