Wilson

Management in Interwar Britain

Continuity and Change

Management in Interwar Britain engages in a debate about the quality of management and the extent of organisational innovation across British business in the interwar period. It has been prompted by the recent publication of several articles that offer a revisionist view of this debate, contradicting what has been the dominant narrative for many decades. The revisionist claims are based solely on an assessment of the impact of Rowntree’s Lecture Series and the Management Research Groups, leading those scholars to conclude that a vibrant community of interest emerged after World War One. The chapters in this book are aimed at evaluating this thesis, as well as its methodological base. Covering sectors as diverse as manufacturing, banking and retail, each author has conducted extensive primary research in order to evaluate the case-study’s position in this debate. The key theme emerging from this work is that while there is evidence of innovation as firms and industries struggle with the macro-economic challenges of that era, the persistence of a ‘proprietorial’ form of capitalism proved to be a major constraint on progress. Another important conclusion relates to the forms of external advice that British firms tapped, given the increasingly important role of accountants, bankers, consultants and management experts. Above all, the essays reveal a highly nuanced scenario, with both continuity and change occurring in different guises; it is a situation that demands much more empirical research before a definitive conclusion can be reached.

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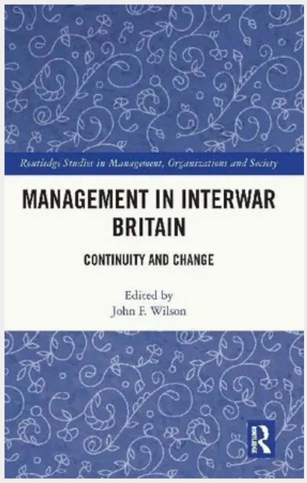

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