

“A nation of shopkeepers?”

"Nation of Shopkeepers" (*L'Angleterre est une nation de boutiquiers*) is a disparaging remark supposedly used by [Napoleon](#) to describe the [United Kingdom](#) as unfit for war against [France](#). The phrase was not, however, original. Napoleon found it in the [Wealth of Nations](#) by [Adam Smith](#), who wrote: "To found a great empire for the sole purpose of raising up a people of customers, may at first sight appear a project altogether unfit for a **nation of shopkeepers**; but extremely fit for a nation that is governed by shopkeepers."

- **Policies**
- **Context**
- **Vision**
- **Analysis**

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Aims: To show the relationship, or lack of it, between policy and research.

Policy: Skills: Getting on in business March (2005) White Paper

Context: Will show why small businesses are important, particularly in terms of education

Vision: What are the aims of the white paper? What does it hope to achieve?

Analysis: Will it work – are the stated aims of the paper (espoused theory) actually achievable when the research is examined?

Policy

White Paper

Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work

March 2005

Initiative

Skills for productivity

March 2005

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In July 2003, the Govt presented its National Skills Strategy. This white paper presented to parliament in march this year, alongside Skills for productivity initiative.

White paper is seen as complementing the 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper presented in February, and arguably attempts to showcase the "Joined up government" approach of Labour to providing a continuity of workforce education.

The white paper sets out the vision for workforce education, how it is to be achieved and the research that backs up the governments case.

Policy

Ruth Kelly:

“The reforms I set out here are of vital importance. They are vital to the economy...today’s teenagers are tomorrows...entrepreneurs...”

Tony Blair:

“We seek a dynamic economy where... productivity is enhanced through high-skilled, well-rewarded employees.”

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Ruth Kelly: Secretary of State for Education and Skills – Foreword to the 14-19 White Paper

Tony Blair – Foreword to the Getting on in Business Paper

I would like you, at this point, to consider the implications of the two statements given here. The first, arguably, uses language that implies a wide-open future for bright young things, with expectations of self-reliance, leadership and entrepreneurship. The second, leading a paper aimed at post-compulsory education, uses an entirely different vocabulary...employees, not entrepreneurs. It might be worth considering Bridges views on the use of language to assert values here.

Context

- 3.8 Million businesses in UK
- 99.1% of UK business was SME
- SMEs account for 55% employment
- More than half UK turnover

Small business service 2002

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Small businesses affect every part of UK life, from economic contribution to societal values. £1050+ Million p/a (Trillion).

Most people don't think of small businesses as important, certainly I would suggest that most people wouldn't place the importance that these statistics show.

Looking at the statistics alone, it is hard to imagine that up until about fifteen years ago there was a dearth of research into smes.

However...

Context

“given this important societal role [of small business] one might expect a significant amount of scholarly research...the evidence, however, suggests that academicians have almost entirely neglected such investigations”

Day, 2000

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Day also said: “The small firm is too important, too dominant and too much about creating the future business generation...for educators not to consider how we can help it to survive and prosper.”

Vision

- Employer partnerships for training delivery
- Increased role for employers in shaping the supply of training
- Raising functional skills of literacy, numeracy and languages
- Improve access to training
- Increase role of trade unions
- Develop strengths of FE establishments

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Ok, so we understand the stated aims of the white paper and context, the background against which it is set. So what exactly does the white paper say? <<HANDOUTS>>

The key points of the paper?

First, the government wants to increase the role employers play in training and delivery through the National Employer Training Scheme – a workgroup of employer, business support programmes and the government.

Secondly, the paper seeks to increase the value of employers by listening to their forecasts for skills needs.

Third, general standards of basic education are addressed

Access for all – removing obstacles to training and work

Increased role in training, an the proposition that increased training ensures a happier, higher-paid workforce.

Develop Strengths – unusual language again, goes on to describe the “greater contestability bringing greater rewards for training providers that best meet the needs of customers”. Um...

Vision

- Audience
- Divergent Language
- Identifies 'knowledge worker' as key
- Identifies future threats

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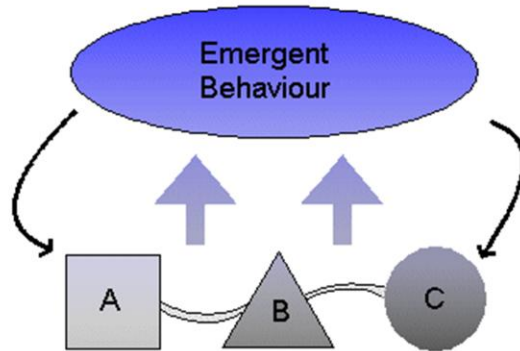
Audience: (1) Politicians (2) Business community (3) – Last – Employees/student

As we have already noted, The language it uses diverges from the language used in the 14-19 Skills white paper. Whereas the 14-19 paper talks in terms of entrepreneurship and leadership, the Getting on in Business paper clearly changes approach and talks in terms of ensuring school leavers are set to become useful employees.

This paper identifies employees whose knowledge (as opposed to technical skill) is the key to their success. It is a bold statement regarding the shift of employment emphasis, and one that hasn't been missed in the business community.

Additionally, the paper also explicitly identifies the threats to UK business that it expects to arise in the near future. China and India are singled out (20M graduates and 2M graduates p/a).

Analysis



Lewin's interpretation of Kauffman's theory of simple systems (1993)

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It could be argued that the white paper has adopted, whether by accident or design, a complex systems approach to policy.

Kauffman, a familiar name in Complex systems theory, created a model which sought to explain the dynamics of complexity. Sadly Kauffman, although undeniably brilliant in his field of molecular self-ordering is akin to Hammersley in terms of his use of language and it didn't reach the wider audience it deserved. So Lewin reworded his model and in doing so created a model useful across a wider range of sciences.

Here it can be seen that the individual simple processes increased employer input, raising basic skills, improving access to training etc will interact with each other to produce a complex behaviour. This behaviour is then recycled back to the simple systems – it affects the simple systems – at which time the process is iterated once more.

Analysis

- News or olds?
- Research led or policy led?
- What has been used?
- What has not been used?

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Is this policy new or is it merely a rationalisation of current trends and practise? It is difficult to say conclusively as the document is so comprehensive. Certainly, there are sections which fall into either category. I would suggest that any organisation that references its own research needs to be aware of the question of validity, however it is hard to see how research of this scale could be funded otherwise: sooner or later the Government would foot the bill and in doing so be complicit in introducing bias.

Having said that, the sources used **are** wholly internal – the Dept for Education and Skills, Dept of Work and Pensions, Dept Trade and Industry etc. Which is a shame as there are other large-scale projects that could have contributed, such as the Federation of Small Businesses whose surveys include Barriers to Growth which highlights the difficulties small businesses have in recruitment and retention. Also, there are several academic institutions who are never backwards in coming forward when it comes to advice.

Analysis

Who benefits?

Global village

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Will the espoused aims actually be realised? It depends on whether you focus on the role of the employer or the employee. The White paper appears to be addressing employers, certainly it offers employers reassurance in copious amounts – however, the results of implementation will affect employees far more than the employers as learning and development will be felt by those at ground level first. Ultimately, implementation as outlined should benefit everyone from employer to employee, from entrepreneur to apprentice.

At present, China has approximately 20 million graduates. India also has staggering numbers of graduates every year – with these threats to UK business, the development of the workforce should be paramount in importance.

Analysis

“...individual success factors are important at different times, so identifying them as tools in the SME bag becomes redundant. Of more importance, is the ability to utilise the factors...appropriately and at the right time.”

Meumfidet, June 2005

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Here I am going to take one of Andrew Lambirth's tricks and self-reference. The point I was trying to make here is that individual skills can be taught and honed over time – the important part is to learn when they are useful. This, I believe can be helped by training that rewards entrepreneurial thinking.

- **Policies**
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My aim was to show the relationship, or lack of it, between policy and research in the Skills: Getting on in business March (2005) White Paper

Hopefully I illustrated the context of the paper: why small businesses are important, particularly in terms of education

I looked at the vision of the paper, its perceived aims and what it hopes to achieve.

In the analysis, I looked at a model for understanding the approach of the act toward education for business, whether the act gave us anything more than we already had and what research was drawn upon in its creation.

I also gave an opinion as to what I feel the likely outcome will be, at a pragmatic level, and finally I showed where I feel the emphasis within training should be placed.