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Business education in First World War captivity: German officers as unrecognised pioneers

Anne Buckley ^a and Nigel Holden^b

^aSchool of Languages, Cultures and Societies, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK; ^bSchool of Business (Emeritus), University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK

ABSTRACT

First World War military prisoners devised a wide range of cultural, physical and educational activities within the camps in Britain. This article focuses on the business education courses at the Skipton German officers' camp in 1918–19 and applies modern knowledge management (KM) concepts to recontextualise the camp as a zone of knowledge production and transfer, and to re-evaluate the knowledge acquired as a military resource. The circumstances unique to the Skipton camp, the skills and motivations of the participants, and the freedom permitted to them to organise their courses as they wished, gave rise to a pioneering business education programme. The purpose of the courses was not only to expand the formal knowledge base of the participants, but to convey future-orientation, sustain morale, inspire an outlook characterised as a global mindset, and reset their identity for civilian life. Scrutiny of the courses has revealed that their content, enhanced by interactive learning processes, constitutes a significant point of intersection between German traditions of business education and more recent trends in United States thinking and practice. In particular, the experimentation with the curriculum and use of case studies were elements ahead of their time compared with business programmes in Germany, but were in line with developments in the US.

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Introduction

At 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, 26 October 1919, some 600 joyous German officers and their orderlies left the port of Hull bound for Germany. These men had all been prisoners of war (POWs) in a camp in the small

CONTACT Anne Buckley  a.buckley@leeds.ac.uk

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market town of Skipton in the north of England during 1918 and 1919. Back on German soil, the officers were motivated by a wish to 'build the Fatherland anew', words from a speech by the senior German officer in the Skipton camp and adopted as a pledge.¹

Hidden in their belongings, some of these former Skipton inmates had managed to smuggle home a considerable number of sketches and pieces of writing, describing in detail almost every aspect of their imprisonment. These writings and drawings were collated and edited by two of the officers and compiled into a 323-page book, which was published at the end of 1920 in Munich under the title *Kriegsgefangen in Skipton: Leben und Geschichte deutscher Kriegsgefangener in einem englischen Lager* [Imprisoned in Skipton: The Story and Lives of German Prisoners of War in an English Camp, see [Image 1](#)].² This rich resource provides an extraordinary insight into, among other things, an innovative education system operating behind the barbed wire, allowing scholars to analyse both the subjects studied and the teaching methods employed.

In April of the following year, the book was reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*. If the reviewer found the book humourless, he (or she) was far more positive about the educational programmes which took place at the camp, noting that 'There were so many officers with good educational

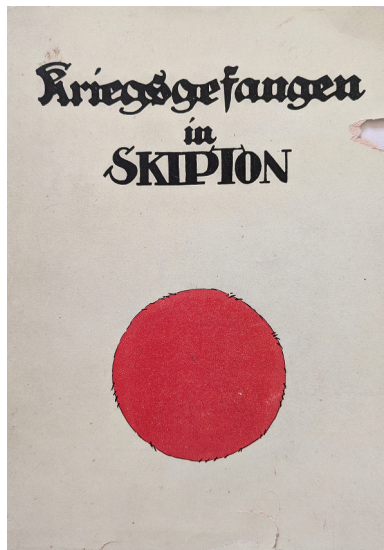


Image 1: *Kriegsgefangen in Skipton* (Sachsse and Cossmann, 1920).

degrees ... [they] carried on a miniature university'.³ During the First World War, scores of such German 'miniature universities' of varying sophistication, all created by inmates subject to local circumstances, proved to be an international phenomenon. In addition to camps in Britain, there were camps in France, Switzerland, Russia, the US and Japan where German POWs set up educational programmes.

Whatever the motivations for such courses, and they will be considered in due course, the designers and recipients of the educational initiatives all had one thing in common; they were all members of temporary social institutions engaged in manifest acts of knowledge creation. Hence it is possible to view those POW camps, where crucially the prisoners were given leeway by the camp authorities to pursue their educational endeavours, as zones of knowledge production and transfer. This article will pursue this idea using the guiding concepts of a particular discipline of management education and research, namely knowledge management (KM), which emerged in the mid-1990s and regards knowledge in its guise as an organisational resource. In doing so, the article combines the history of internment with the history of business education. It is the suite of business courses that were organised in the Skipton camp in 1918–19 that will be the focus of attention.

Whilst the scholarship on the military internment of Germans in the First World War is rich,⁴ it only makes very general reference to the existence of business education and the topic is never accorded special treatment, remaining marginalised. The article aims to address this lacuna by analysing the extensive account of the business courses at the Skipton camp, described by the German officers in their book *Kriegsgefangen in Skipton*. As will be discussed, the courses at the Skipton camp were a complex amalgam of motivations, scope, knowledge inputs and the expectations associated with them.

The article firstly considers German POWs in the First World War, briefly discussing the motivations behind the various educational, physical and cultural activities they organised in POW camps. The focus of attention will then turn to the Skipton camp, analysing the motivations behind its business education programme and the evolution of its design. After this, the article considers the knowledge management features of the business education programme, and then compares the Skipton programme to relevant German and American business education initiatives. In this process, one of the aims is to contribute to the wider debate about First

World War military internment by (a) reappraising the marginalised topic of business education; (b) widening the understanding of knowledge as a military resource; and (c) reassessing the impact of local settings on knowledge management.

Germans in captivity in the First World War

Of the approximately 70 million soldiers mobilised globally during the First World War, almost nine million spent some time in enemy captivity,⁵ including nearly a million Germans.⁶ Of these, 430,000 were captured by the French,⁷ Russia held 168,000,⁸ and the British captured 335,516.⁹ Of the German POWs held by the British, around 200,000 were utilised as labour in France¹⁰ and an estimated 132,750 were brought to Britain.¹¹ Smaller numbers of Germans were captured by Serbia (5,840)¹² and Romania (12,898).¹³ In addition, approximately 4,600 German military personnel were captured by the Japanese and taken to Japan, following the German defeat at the Siege of Tsingtao (Qingdao) in November 1914.¹⁴

The study of the Great War's prisoners was once considered a 'neglected history'¹⁵ but since the 1990s the body of literature on military internment has become quite extensive. Some of the earlier scholarship focused on abuse, for example the work of Heather Jones and Uta Hinz.¹⁶ Panikos Panayi's 2012 monograph *Prisoners of Britain: German Civilian and Combatant Internees during the First World War* was the first academic study to look at both the military and civilian Germans interned in Britain.¹⁷ Brian Feltman built on Panayi's work, but narrowed the focus to issues of masculinity,¹⁸ an aspect also covered by Iris/Alon Rachamimov.¹⁹

Officer POWs could not be utilised for labour according to the Hague Convention of 1907,²⁰ so they had to find 'a way of escaping the monotony of life behind barbed wire'²¹ and creating a purpose to their lives. Many officers' camps around the world (containing POWs of various nationalities) organised similar activities including sport, music, theatre, education, religion and the production of camp newspapers. These types of activities also took place in camps for other ranks but tended to be less extensive, as these men had less money to buy materials and equipment, and were also set to work by their captors.

A number of scholars have focused on the internal nature of the camp and the activities organised by the POWs. Camp theatres have

been studied by, for example, Jennifer Kewley Draskau and Iris Rachamimov,²² Christoph Jahr and Panayi have written on sport²³ and Rainer Pöppinghege, Oliver Wilkinson and Anne Schwan on POW camp newspapers and magazines.²⁴ Organising and taking part in educational, physical and cultural activities was beneficial to the prisoners' mental and physical health and would have helped them to manage 'barbed-wire disease'. This psychological condition was identified by the Swiss physician Dr Adolf Vischer, who inspected some of the British POW camps. Vischer found that 'those who had been in enemy captivity for extended periods – two years or more – were also suffering from a particular kind of mental illness characterized by disinterest in life beyond the camp, restlessness and an inability to concentrate'.²⁵

In addition to relieving the boredom of captivity, there were various other motivations behind the activities organised by German prisoners.²⁶ These have been discussed in detail by Feltman and Panayi²⁷ and are similar to the motivations behind the activities of the British POWs in Germany, as discussed by Wilkinson.²⁸ In the case of musical and theatrical activities, the POWs often wanted to evoke the atmosphere of home. The Skipton prisoners, for example, hoped that the performances of their choir 'might lighten the burden of imprisonment and conjure up a vision of home for their comrades'.²⁹ Some of the songs contained nationalist sentiments, which allowed the prisoners to express their patriotism and loyalty to Germany.³⁰ Theatrical performances also offered a means of escapism (for both the actors and the audience).³¹

Camp newspapers created a sense of community by providing information about forthcoming events in the camp, and also gave the prisoners an outlet for their feelings about captivity, in particular through poetry and drawings.³² Prisoners in some camps were able to send copies of the camp newspaper back home to Germany or to other countries.³³ This allowed the prisoners to proclaim their allegiance to Germany and to demonstrate that they were using their time in captivity productively.³⁴ This would have been important to the prisoners as it was considered shameful to have been captured by the enemy, and the prisoners would have been concerned about how they would be received on return to Germany.³⁵ The German attitude to surrender is made clear in a German code of conduct from 1918 that stated, 'For a man to allow himself to be taken prisoner by the enemy without having defended himself to the utmost is a dishonourable act equivalent to treachery'.³⁶ Sport and physical activity were also considered by the prisoners to be a productive use of time, and preparation for

rebuilding Germany on repatriation.³⁷ The various games and sports festivals organised by German POWs provided enjoyment and camaraderie too.³⁸

Feltman and Panayi's studies cover the camp education systems in detail and include the subjects studied by the POWs, the numbers of instructors and prisoner-students at some of the camps, and the organisations that provided instructional materials.³⁹ Feltman has also been able to determine the legacy of some of the camp education systems with details of how some of the POWs made use of the skills acquired in the camps following repatriation.⁴⁰ This article aims to build on Feltman and Panayi's work by analysing the seemingly mundane topic of business and finance courses. By studying the ways in which the German POWs in Skipton attempted to transfer their 'business proficiency and competence, which are the fruits of years of experience and business activity',⁴¹ the article seeks to contribute to a more complete understanding of the activities and experiences of the German POWs in the First World War. In particular, this study aligns itself with more recent scholarship that claims the First World War did not end on 11 November 1918;⁴² the intensification of the Skipton business courses from the Armistice until the POWs were repatriated in October 1919 demonstrates that, while the war was officially over, these men were continuing in their struggle to save Germany.

Business education in POW camps containing Germans

Analysis of primary and secondary sources reveals that business education took place as part of the cultural and educational activities in POW camps containing Germans across the globe. In the Lofthouse Park camp (England), there were lectures on single and double entry bookkeeping, and 'currency exchange and cheque transactions, banking and stock exchange' in response to a specific request for professional training by 'young businessmen'.⁴³ In the Handforth camp (England), there were courses on various different types of stenography, a Spanish business correspondence course, and a 'special course' on commerce [*Handel*],⁴⁴ which included 'banking and commerce', 'commercial bookkeeping', and 'commercial arithmetic'.⁴⁵ In the Oswestry camp (England), the courses included banking, bookkeeping and stenography.⁴⁶ In the Russian camps of Razdolnoye, near Vladivostok, and Khabarovsk there were *Handelskurse* [business courses].⁴⁷

At Davos in neutral Switzerland, interned sick and injured German soldiers, including officers, studied business courses, which were approved by the German authorities. The syllabus was in line with courses in institutions in Germany offering business education, though notable for its impressive range of foreign language courses (English, French, Russian, Italian, Spanish, Turkish, Hungarian and Portuguese).⁴⁸

In Japan, prisoner Siegfried Berliner conducted business education firstly in the Marugame camp and then in the Bando camp. In a report for the German East Asiatic Society (OAG) on his teaching, he wrote:

Since the planned business school courses in Marugame could not be held for certain reasons, I repeatedly held courses, exercises and discussions on East Asian economic issues in smaller circles, both in Marugame, and later in Bando. For accounting courses, business transactions from the Chinese export and import trade were used as a basis, which gave the opportunity to discuss individual questions.⁴⁹

Berliner went on to compile his materials into a series of books that were published in Hanover in 1920 following his repatriation.⁵⁰

The information available suggests that the focus of business education in these camps in the various countries where German military personnel were detained was overwhelmingly on commercial processes. However, in the Skipton camp it appears that something remarkably innovative was taking place.

The Skipton camp

The Skipton POW camp (see [Image 2](#)) was opened in January 1918⁵¹ on the site of a military training camp built in 1914–15 for the Bradford Pals (battalions of the West Yorkshire Regiment).⁵² The camp was one of eighteen designated officers' camps in Britain of a total of over 600 POW camps.⁵³ The maximum occupancy of the camp was 560 officers and 120 other ranks, who acted as their orderlies.⁵⁴ The majority of men were from the army but there were also some naval personnel and some airmen. Of the 916 German prisoners who spent time in the Skipton camp, 592 were reservists from a wide range of professional backgrounds.⁵⁵ Accommodation was in wooden barrack huts: other ranks were generally 34 to a hut, with lower-ranking officers in groups of 24. Senior officers were accommodated in smaller groups.⁵⁶ The

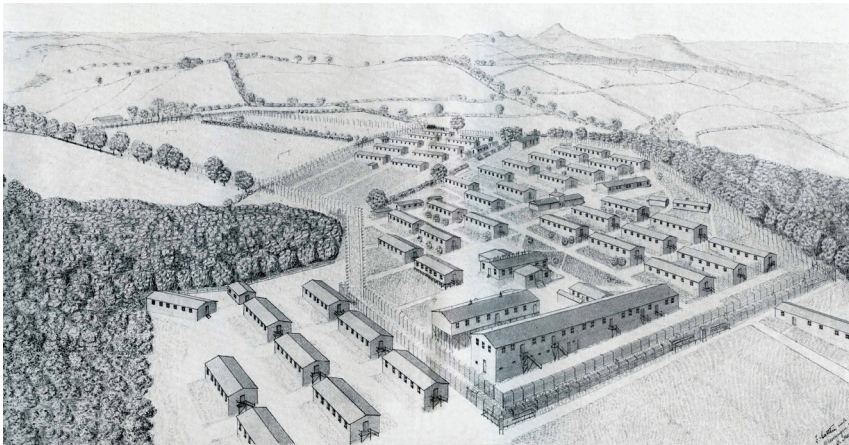


Image 2: 'Bird's eye view of the camp' by POW Julius Matthies, published in *Kriegsgefangen in Skipton*.

commandant in charge of the Skipton POW camp was a British army officer, but below him much of the administration work and running of the camp was carried out by the Germans themselves, and German rank hierarchy continued to apply.⁵⁷ As in other officers' camps, the Skipton POWs organised a variety of activities, including an orchestra, a chamber music ensemble, a choir, a theatre group, a camp newspaper, sports, walking groups and an education system.⁵⁸

The officer POWs in the Skipton camp set up an education system shortly after their arrival in January 1918. The number of timetabled hours of teaching progressed from nine in the first week to around 180 hours by the time the men were repatriated in October 1919. These 'open courses' covered a wide range of subject areas including foreign languages, mathematics and sciences, business, history, art history, and forestry. Officers also regularly delivered one-off lectures on a wide range of subjects.⁵⁹ In addition, the qualified teachers in the camp set up a 'Teachers' Association' [*Pädagogische Vereinigung*] for the purpose of organising their own continued professional development.

These teachers also created an *Abitur* course (highest German school leaving qualification) for the younger officers who had not completed their schooling. They obtained approval for the course from the Prussian Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, and permission to set examinations in the camp. The exam results were officially

accredited on return to Germany.⁶⁰ They also set up a teacher training course in the camp for the eight trainee teachers who had been called up for military service before completing their studies. This course was likewise recognised by the Prussian Ministry.⁶¹ In addition, a number of POWs worked independently on doctoral and postdoctoral study while in the Skipton camp.⁶² It was in this environment that the business courses took place.

The Skipton business programme, the motivations behind it and the evolution of its design

In the book *Kriegsgefangen in Skipton*, prisoner Hans Boecker explains that the businessmen in the Skipton camp started their studies with foreign language learning and then added double-entry bookkeeping, the monetary and banking systems, the stock exchange and economics. He describes how the officer-POWs continued to develop and expand on the business education programme, particularly following the Armistice, until they were finally repatriated at the end of October 1919.⁶³

Boecker also explains some of the motivations for the business education programme in the Skipton camp. Many of these are similar to those explained earlier in this article and include 'to use the opportunity to extend our knowledge and equip ourselves for peace' and 'to pursue studies which could be of use to them in their future careers'.⁶⁴ The Skipton officers were also focussed on developing their skills in order to help rebuild Germany, being fully aware that their homeland was in a lamentable condition after four years of war and, later, the German Revolution of 1918–19. In addition, they were convinced that the 'bare-faced viciousness and brutal destructiveness' of the Paris Peace Settlement was designed to undermine the German economy.⁶⁵ Nothing exemplified this more than the planned destruction of the German merchant fleet.⁶⁶ Boecker noted that, in the post-war world, German firms may well have found themselves black-listed in various countries 'at the instigation of the English, of course'.⁶⁷ The officers also feared that the French would cooperate with Britain in 'shutting down' German trade and industry.⁶⁸ In short, the German officers anticipated not only a wrecked Germany, but also a hostile international business environment.

The German officers clearly felt that this new, disturbing business world would require not only practical business skills, but a complete intellectual re-evaluation. Therefore, the aim of the business courses would be to

prepare the officers for a fundamentally anti-German peace. It is striking that the motivations of the Skipton officers were overwhelmingly focused on Germany's future as an international trading nation. Surprisingly, there is no specific discussion about the challenges of creating and running companies in post-war Germany. In short, the tutors' efforts were directed to the creation of what today would be called 'a global mindset', which is an enlightened way of thinking about 'multiple local cultures' as well as 'a disposition and ability to negotiate between them and draw on them in context, time and occasion-specific ways'.⁶⁹ When considering this, it should be remembered that the officers of the Skipton camp were studying five foreign languages and learning about business practices in several countries (see Table 1).

There can be no doubt that there was widespread agreement among 'the numerous businessmen of the camp', who 'formed a closer bond for mutual encouragement' about the importance and urgency of gaining new business knowledge and insights.⁷⁰ Indeed, it was precisely this compelling need which led to the formation in the spring of 1919 of the Business Association [*Kaufmännische Vereinigung*] in the camp, under whose aegis the business education programme would be further developed. An explicit function of the Business Association was to promote bonding, which, as will be explained later, can be seen as an emotional and knowledge-sharing experience.

From the beginning, the members of the Business Association were aware that the skills and competences for business in the post-war world 'cannot simply be acquired by theoretical study'.⁷¹ Even so, the various business courses at the camp come under the general heading of *Handelwissenschaften* [business sciences], the word *Wissenschaften* implying that the education would be informed by theory, and be intellectually rigorous.⁷² This "elevated" designation of business education has

Table 1. Summary of business curriculum at Skipton.⁷³

Topic	Content
Foreign languages	Commercial correspondence in English and Spanish; courses in Russian, Portuguese and French
Economics	Economic theory and macro-economics
International Trade	Zanzibar, East Asia, India, South America
Finance	Monetary system, banking system, stock exchange
Industries and business sectors	Paper industry, semi-precious stones, banking and finance, coffee, colonial goods, iron and coal
Law	Commercial law, bankruptcy law
Functions	Double-entry book-keeping, stenography, typewriting
Case studies ⁷⁴	Pre-war businessmen lead interactive learning classes with younger officers
Live case	Hamburg import-export house

a distinct purpose: to make it abundantly clear that in the diverse repertoire of educational innovations at the Skipton camp the business courses were not seen as intellectually inferior to other offerings.

A typology of key subjects and their respective content (above) has been created from the limited information available in the book *Kriegsgefangen in Skipton*.

It can be stated with certainty that what finally emerged was an ad hoc and improvised course concept. It could hardly be otherwise, precisely because the individual topics were based on the knowledge and experience of individual officers and their undoubted willingness to disseminate this to comrades in a structured way. In addition, planning could only have been short term as, particularly following the Armistice, the German officers were expecting to be repatriated at any time.

Prisoner Boecker states that "it was only natural that, as businessmen, we began with the study of foreign languages, especially English",⁷⁵ adding that "it is of course *our duty* to pay close attention to the events of the outside world".⁷⁶ Foreign languages were regarded as advantageous in securing closeness to customers, but, in the post-war era, the English language would have an additional special function to the future German businessman of the Skipton camp. It would be an essential tool for monitoring the international business environment. Hence, copies of *The Economist* and, when they could get it, the trade supplement of *The Times*, "were eagerly studied".⁷⁷ This is a very good example of foreign language know-how being re-purposed for future commercial advantage. As discussed earlier, the officers appeared to have assumed that Britain would not be a land of commercial opportunity for German firms in the post-war era. Instead, they were improving their English for its benefits as a language of international trade.

It is important to point out that a major focus of the foreign language business education was commercial correspondence. For centuries, letters had been purposely crafted in "business language at its most ornamental" in order to facilitate long-distance intercultural rapport-building for winning (and keeping) customers.⁷⁸ This explains why skills in preparing business letters, especially in foreign languages, were so highly prized and why tuition in no fewer than five foreign languages was available to Germany's future businessmen at the Skipton Camp.

For the learning of English, French and Spanish, it seems reasonable to suppose that the officers had access to grammars, dictionaries, and possibly textbooks on commercial correspondence.⁷⁹ However, there

were also beginners' courses in Portuguese (for South America) and Russian. Prior to the First World War, "many businessmen" had "close business relations with Russia".⁸⁰ Indeed, in the nineteenth century, Germany was "the most active trade partner of Russia".⁸¹

An important aspect of business education at the Skipton camp was the availability of "numerous textbooks". (Skipton POWs using textbooks for their study are depicted in [Image 3](#)). There is mention of one standard business textbook in use: *Rothschilds Taschenbuch für Kaufleute* [Handbook for Businessmen], first published in 1886.⁸² It would not be inappropriate to describe this book as a primer for future business people. The contents of the book include business history, economic geography, world trade, and transportation. Books on *Volkswirtschaft* [political economy] – the building block of any business course at that time – were especially in demand among the Skipton prisoners. Several books were in the personal possession of various officers, who willingly shared them with their comrades.⁸³ The German camp administration in Skipton set up a book purchasing group and they were allowed to submit a weekly order for books in English and German to a London bookshop – "in this way many men acquired reading material for their university studies or other professional qualifications".⁸⁴ The Skipton POWs also received books via the Swedish Red Cross and a Berlin charity for imprisoned academics.⁸⁵



Image 3: "Hard Labour" by POW Erich Dunkelgod, published in *Kriegsgefangen in Skipton*.

In summary, three notable aspects of business education at the Skipton camp with reference to motivation and design have been highlighted. Firstly, the Skipton business education programme was geared to international business challenges with its striking emphasis on (a) foreign language competence and (b) global awareness, the latter being an intangible, non-curricular component. Secondly, an unstated aim of the business education appeared to be to encourage the officers to see themselves as post-war business leaders. Thirdly, the designers of the business course encouraged two (for their time, advanced) interrelated functions that today would be called bonding and networking.

In order to appreciate the magnitude of the German achievement, it is necessary to examine the situation in Germany and the US – both countries were in the vanguard of developing specialist business education in tune with the requirements of the industrial era. Firstly, however, this article will unravel the notion, already mentioned, of the Skipton camp as a zone of knowledge production and transfer. The discussion will be influenced by the guiding concepts of a discipline of management education, namely knowledge management. This discipline came to prominence in the 1990s, springing from a long-standing quest in the world of management practice for techniques to improve the dissipation of innovations throughout organisations.⁸⁶

Knowledge management processes at the Skipton camp

Knowledge management (KM) can be viewed as “the systematic and organised attempt to use knowledge within an organisation to improve performance”.⁸⁷ In the context of the Skipton camp, “performance” will be taken to include various intangible factors such as maintenance of military discipline, comradeship, and a patriotic outlook, as well as commitment to rebuilding post-war Germany and to resetting the prisoners’ own identities for civilian life. Unlike in a business organisation, there were no quantitative targets with which to measure the impact of business education at the Skipton camp.

KM makes a distinction between explicit (hard) and tacit (soft) knowledge. The former category includes knowledge which is objective, formal and systematic, whilst the latter refers to hard-to-codify insights derived from personal experience, impressions and intuitions. These distinctions can be directly applied to the development of business education at the camp. Explicit elements used in knowledge transfer involve authoritative

textbooks and statements of specialist tutors. Tacit elements would, for example, abound in discussions of foreign business cultures or the Hamburg import-export company (see [Table 1](#)). The resulting knowledge sharing and individual learning results from socialisation, which in a KM context refers to “the transfer of tacit knowledge among individuals through creating shared experiences”.⁸⁸ In the environment of the Skipton camp, socialisation was by no means limited to discussions in the place of learning. It could have taken place among individuals in various settings: in their huts, in the canteen, during roll-call, even on the organised hikes beyond the barbed wire.

As previously mentioned, when the German officers established the Business Association in the spring of 1919, they further developed their business courses. This was linked to “the desire” of the participants to “make the experiences of the older comrades accessible to a wider circle through the exchange of ideas”.⁸⁹ Some lectures took the form of question-and-answer sessions on general and specific business topics as detailed in [Table 1](#). The creation of the Business Association led directly to the formation of the zone of knowledge production and management at the camp. This purely conceptual zone was a temporary metaphysical space which emerged within the physical confines of the camp (i.e., behind the barbed wire). The imaginary zone was wholly within the jurisdiction of the British authorities, but functioned thanks to the discretion permitted to the German internees to create their various educational, cultural and sporting activities with limited interference. With specific regard to the business courses, the knowledge in play was multifaceted and should not be viewed purely in terms of academic content. Its goal was not truth, but effective performance: not “what is right” but “*what works*”.⁹⁰

Given that “a lively debate would always follow the lectures”,⁹¹ it can be concluded that this desire to learn more was not only focused on acquisition of useful information, but also on a recognition that interactive learning based on socialisation enriched the process. Furthermore, as this plainly stimulating interactive blending of hard and soft knowledge was being imparted, learners discussed it, whereby they and the tutors *co-created* business acumen within the zone of knowledge, converting it to a resource for all. This co-created knowledge, the result of all these interactions, was, formally speaking, a resource of the German military, all participants being serving officers.

Organisational knowledge as the result of co-creation process was not clearly identified until 1995 with the publication of Nonaka's and Takeuchi's landmark text *The Knowledge-Creating Company*.⁹²

From the evidence in the German accounts in *Kriegsgefangen in Skipton*, the business education programme was well received by all participants. Its success can probably be attributed to a number of important intangibles, beyond simply the desire to use the time in captivity productively: an atmosphere of mutual trust conducive to collaborative learning;⁹³ minimal interference by the British camp authorities; a willingness to participate in an experimental education process; the patriotic and intellectual motivation of all interacting parties; pervasive military discipline; and anticipation of anti-German business conditions provoked by its wartime enemies. Advantageous to the whole process was that the officers were well educated and highly motivated. Without of course being aware of their achievement, the officers created a distinctive knowledge community in the unlikely setting of a POW camp.⁹⁴

In the model below (Figure 1) the critical features of the knowledge production, transfer, and co-creation processes have been grouped under five discrete, yet sequentially linked headings: key challenge, contextual drivers, knowledge inputs, the knowledge-sharing process and outcome. What, of course, the model cannot convey is the dynamic interactive nature of the depicted processes and the unique spatial features of the particular zone of knowledge production at Skipton.

Figure 1 reduces the complexities of knowledge production and transfer processes to five discrete, interlocking stages. The key point is that knowledge transfer is not represented as a straightforward linear process. The factors associated with each stage are best seen as in perpetual dynamic interplay with each other and are unique to the setting of the Skipton camp in 1918–19.

By applying KM concepts, this article reveals features of the business courses at the Skipton camp that would have otherwise remained undetected, and has also, in the process, recontextualised the camp as a zone of knowledge production and transfer. These factors are important in the following section, which will contrast the innovative courses at the camp with pre-war business education priorities and practices in Germany and the US.

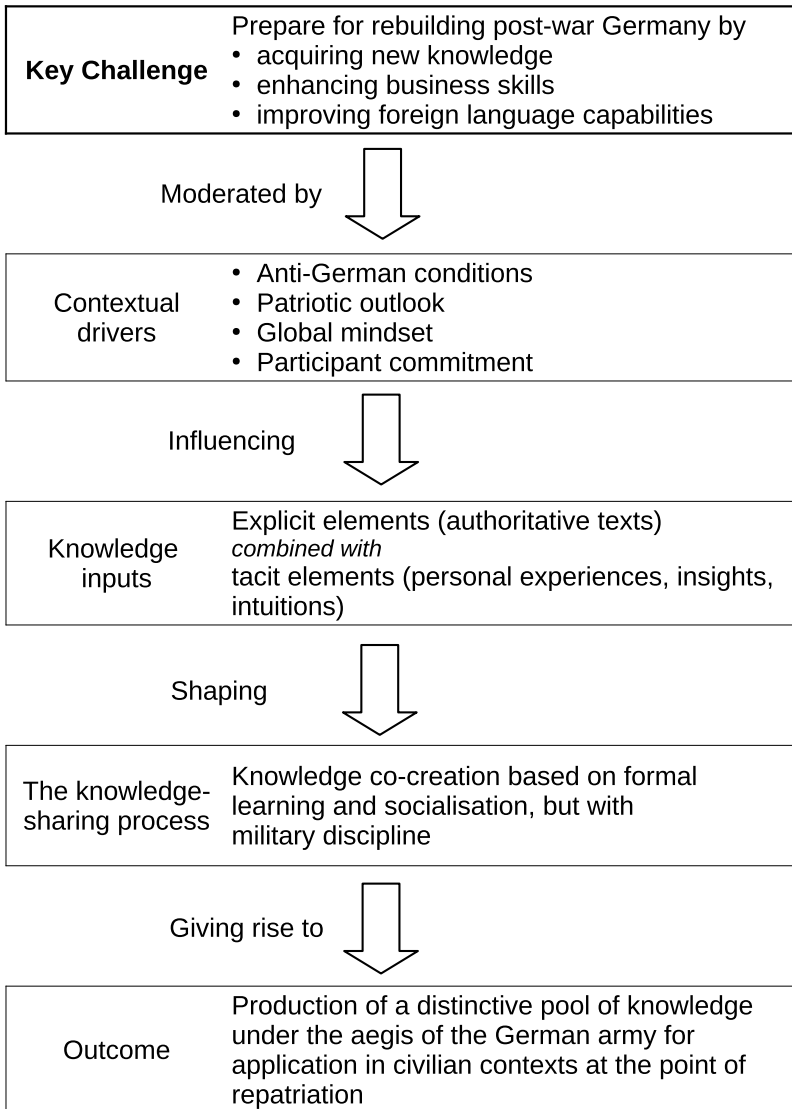


Figure 1. Knowledge management processes at the Skipton camp 1918–1919.

Business education at the Skipton camp: historical perspectives in Germany and the US

Germany: the grand alliance of science, economics, and business planning

By the mid-nineteenth century, the boom in railways and telegraph spurred the emergence of industrial enterprises, industrial markets (i.e.,

markets for specific industrial products) and the expansion of private enterprise [*Einzelwirtschaft*]. In both Germany and the US, the face of business was changing “with [such] appalling rapidity” that a new kind of education for businessmen was urgently called for.⁹⁵ In Germany’s case, to the rescue came economics, which “claimed to be a central science, in that it could change social and thus political structures”.⁹⁶

It was recognised that this new science could give Germany “supremacy in business and in technical matters”.⁹⁷ This was because the statistical power of economics endowed it with not only intellectual respectability but also the potential to provide Germany’s new major industrial enterprises with a valuable new business tool: planning. It was precisely planning that these enterprises needed to offset the “mistrust of market forces”, especially among the growing number of small and medium-sized enterprises.⁹⁸

Against this background, the industrial magnate and banker, Gustav von Mevissen (1815–1899), “bemoaned” that Germany’s new technical universities were not offering business education as part of their core curriculum,⁹⁹ and so proposed a new form of educational institution to the city fathers of Cologne. He believed this should be appropriate to the times and the complexities of industrial markets and completely in tune with the conviction that “the sciences, by their very nature, formed a natural alliance with engineering, commerce and industry”.¹⁰⁰ Mevissen backed up his proposal with a substantial donation to the city of Cologne. His new institution came into being in 1901.

Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century one can talk of “a genuine movement” behind the new developments in business education.¹⁰¹ Nothing more symbolised this impulse than the establishment in 1896 of the *Deutscher Verband für das kaufmännische Unterrichtswesen* (DVkU) [German Association for Business Education]. This had the remit of encouraging new tertiary-level institutions “conducive to the public good” with the explicit practical aim of “strengthening the international competitiveness of German business”.¹⁰² These institutions called themselves *Handelshochschulen*, the English translation of which is sometimes “business school”, but this rendering carries unhelpful connotations of late twentieth-century business schools in the US.

By the outbreak of war in 1914, seven *Handelshochschulen* had come into being in Germany, funded and run by a variety of local bodies: Leipzig (1898), Aachen (1898), Cologne (1901), Frankfurt-am-Main (1901), Berlin (1906), Mannheim (1907–8) and Munich (1910).¹⁰³

A typical curriculum in these institutions would offer as its core subjects: economics, law, economic history and economic geography. There would also be tuition in commercial arithmetic, business correspondence (in German, French and English) as well as stenography and type-writing.¹⁰⁴

These institutions emphasised business *as a science*, whereby the focus was on empirical research, involving “detailed studies which described, analysed and systematised data from practice (such as cost accounting procedures)”.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, Germany’s first academic journal of business research, the *Zeitschrift für handelswissenschaftliche Forschung*, appeared in 1908.¹⁰⁶ The new institutions would eventually use a new term for their educational programmes, namely *Betriebswirtschaftslehre*, or BWL for short, which emphasised “the scientific treatment of business technique and business organisation”.¹⁰⁷ BWL courses were expressly aimed at educated and ambitious young men in Germany’s rapidly expanding industrial enterprises.

The German tradition at the Skipton camp

It is unclear how familiar any of the German officers were with business education in Germany. Research to date has not identified a pre-war professor of economics or business administration among the officers.¹⁰⁸ Yet there are clues that at least one person was familiar with academic education for business in pre-war Germany. As already noted, the officers designated their business courses under the rubric *Handelwissenschaften*, not *Wirtschaftswissenschaften* [economic sciences] and certainly not *kaufmännische Fortbildung* [commercial education]. This meant that the Skipton courses were consciously designed, whatever the limitations of camp life, to be as scientifically rigorous as possible.

The officers’ programme was of course no more than a shadow in comparison with a fully-fledged business course at the *Handelshochschulen*. Nevertheless, there are some similarities worthy of note. Firstly, there was a strong emphasis on economics. Secondly, the officers had the belief that the formal study of business could be pursued with rigour on a par with other disciplines. Thirdly, they had the conviction that a self-respecting programme in business education must embrace several subject areas to reflect the growing complexity of modern industrial society. Even if the officer-tutors had no experience of *Handelshochschulen* before the war, many had, as noted earlier, learnt

about the world of business through apprenticeships. This suggests that they brought a specifically practical [*praxisorientiert*] edge to their lectures at the Skipton camp.

The Skipton course can be said to reflect a general tradition well established in nineteenth-century German business education, which combined standard business topics such as double-entry bookkeeping and commercial arithmetic with foreign languages for business correspondence. However, its orientation towards post-war international business only has its correlate with education at the *Handelshochschule* in Cologne, which recognised that “business leadership in the twentieth century would depend on insight into the working of the world’s economic life”.¹⁰⁹ This reinforces the proposition that business education at the Skipton camp had the specific, if unstated, objective of preparing the officers for future business leadership roles.

The American elements in the Skipton business course

It has been shown that the experimental business programme developed by the German officers deviated both in content and delivery from the courses offered in the German *Handelshochschulen*. What is striking is that their improvisations bear unmistakable resemblance to innovations in business education being forged by Harvard Business School, which was founded in 1908. From the beginning, Harvard was keen on “experimentation and specialised courses”.¹¹⁰ Edwin Gay, the first dean, had a reputation for making appointments that were “eclectic and often adventurous”.¹¹¹

There is nothing to indicate that any officer in the camp had the remotest idea about business education in the US and yet there are three instances of features on the Skipton courses that have *direct* correlates with business education at Harvard. The first factor relates to experimentation. The early history of Harvard Business School is striking for its willingness to experiment with teaching methods and course subject matter. For very different reasons, the Skipton officers faced the same challenge, but Harvard had a great advantage. It was well funded. For their part, the Skipton men had to combine experimentation with resourcefulness.

The second factor relates to networking. It has been noted that the Skipton officers explicitly discussed the idea of maintaining links with each other after the war for mutual benefit: to renew acquaintance and

share knowledge and experience, no longer as military officers but as businessmen. Harvard Business School was already encouraging something similar with its graduates. In 1914, it established its alumni association. Its founders were “aware of the advantages of the informal ‘network’ of the College alumni” who, exactly like the Skipton officers, would have a strong sense of loyalty to each other.¹¹² This idea of bonding and networking on a business educational programme for future professional advantage, as encouraged at the Skipton camp, is therefore strikingly modern.

The third factor concerns the use of case studies as a teaching method. Dean Edwin Gay started to use case studies experimentally before the First World War.¹¹³ When the case method finally came on stream at Harvard in 1924, it was the result of years of discussion. In its time, the case study was a very sophisticated way of teaching business practice. One Harvard professor involved with case studies in 1913 noted: “the instructors as a rule conducted the courses more by general discussion than by lectures”.¹¹⁴ In Skipton it would appear that something similar was happening. One officer-tutor “gave a series of lectures on the topic of money and currency problems”, which resulted in “a lively debate”.¹¹⁵ The same man also delivered a course on the previously-mentioned Hamburg import-export business in which he described “the running” [*Gang*] of the firm including book-keeping and business correspondence.¹¹⁶ It is reasonable to assume that debate also took place during this course.

From this evidence, it can be concluded that the Skipton men were already developing a method of instruction that, after the First World War, would become known as “the case method”. The Skipton cases may look shallow in comparison with those at Harvard Business School, but they nevertheless served the same function: to encourage the students to produce feasible solutions to business challenges based on ample (but not necessarily complete) background information. A further point about case studies is that they required tutors and officer-students to engage in processes of interactive learning, which resulted in the co-creation of knowledge. The most illuminating example of co-creation is the *unwitting* blending of the traditional German knowledge with the highlighted “American” elements (i.e., experimental programme design, networking, use of case studies). In other words, the Skipton camp was a highly novel zone for the production and transfer of knowledge.

Conclusion

In this article the topic of business education at the Skipton camp has not been discussed in a perfunctory way as if it were a discrete, ephemeral phenomenon with limited reference to the outside world. In other words, it has not been cast as a closed, purely self-referential aspect of camp culture alongside camp newspapers and camp theatre. Instead, by using concepts from knowledge management on the one hand, and referring to pertinent historical experience in Germany and the US on the other, it has been possible to recontextualise and illuminate business education at the Skipton camp a hundred years after the officers left their “barbed-wire cage”.¹¹⁷ It is worth noting here that their experimental business course had been conducted in a country, Britain, where, in complete contrast to the US and Germany, equivalent scientifically-based business education in the nineteenth century had failed to take root. Indeed, by the end of the century, business itself “was becoming less acceptable as an occupation for the sons of the middle classes”¹¹⁸ and “industrial management did not attract the calibre of entrant that was true of other countries”.¹¹⁹ Indeed when, in 1918, the hundreds of German officer-prisoners arrived at the Skipton camp, the British education system was said to be in “retreat from business and industry”.¹²⁰

Three important factors have emerged from this analysis. Firstly, if viewed from a strictly German perspective, it is abundantly clear that the business courses at the Skipton camp were genuinely innovative thanks to the emphasis on the production of future business leaders, on the one hand, and creating a global mindset, on the other. Secondly, when also considering the “American” elements in the programme, that is to say, experimentation, the emphasis on networking, and the use of case studies, it can be seen that the business courses at the Skipton camp in the years 1918–19 constitute a remarkable point of intersection between German traditions of university business education and the more recent trends in US thinking and practice. That fact alone is of historical significance in the context of the remarkably long evolution of German business education, which can trace its origins back to the fifteenth century.¹²¹ Thirdly, the application of knowledge management concepts has been indispensable in the recontextualisation of business education at the Skipton camp.

The process of knowledge production and sharing was revealed as uneven and dynamic. Knowledge not only emerged as a confection of inputs delivered via the courses, but as a complex, multifaceted entity. For

example, it was knowledge geared to handling the anticipated practicalities of the post-war business world; it served to facilitate the change of identity from civilian to soldier and back again from soldier to civilian; and it drew on the pre-war experiences of officers who had had business careers. Importantly, the acquired knowledge was far more than accumulated facts, and for the following reason: as it was being imparted, the knowledge was being co-created in an interplay of tacit and explicit modes as a corporate resource.

This article has also argued that the knowledge generated in the camp can be seen as a resource of the German military because its agents were serving officers in uniform. By way of clarification, it is axiomatic that the word knowledge, when used in *normal* military contexts, is readily associated with the terminology of the science of war and content of manuals of military conduct. This knowledge has a strongly formal character. However, the business knowledge generated by and for the officers, as a confection of formal and informal, was created *hors de combat* and had nothing to do with any planned military operations, covert or otherwise, against the enemy. It was being generated in a militarised space, namely a POW camp, for application in a specific civilian context, the anticipated post-war world of business.

By recasting the Skipton camp as a zone of knowledge management, which was unique to the mix of men and the confined conditions in which they existed, the camp has emerged not only as a highly unusual knowledge management setting in its own right, but also as the facilitator of the contextual drivers of the business courses and the intended outcomes. Through this approach, focussing on the interactive learning developed by the officers of the Skipton camp, it has been possible to bring to light unseen facets not only of the business education but also of camp life itself.

Notes

1. Sachsse and Cossmann, *Kriegsgefangen in Skipton*. An English translation of the book is included in Buckley, *German Prisoners of the Great War*. References to the text of the book in this article will be to the English translation. Page numbers for the information in this paragraph are 285 and 290.
2. Ibid.
3. "A Yorkshire prisoner-of-war camp from within" (*Times Literary Supplement*, 21 April 1921).
4. See, for instance, the items referenced in notes 5 to 30 below.

5. Nachtigal, "Zur Anzahl," 348; and Jones, *Violence*, 2, provide an estimate of seven to nine million.
6. Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender*, 13.
7. Nachtigal, "Zur Anzahl," 371; and Jones, *Violence*, 22, provide figures from various sources that range between 327,373 and 429,200.
8. Nachtigal, "Zur Anzahl," 366; and Davis, "Deutsche Kriegsgefangene," 37, give a figure of 167,000.
9. Nachtigal, "Zur Anzahl," 372; and Jones, *Violence*, 22, provide figures from various sources that range between 306,593 and 328,000.
10. Nachtigal, "Zur Anzahl," 373.
11. Weiland and Kern, *In Feindeshand*, Vol. 1, 428; and Nachtigal, "Zur Anzahl," 373, provide a figure of 103,000.
12. Weiland and Kern, *In Feindeshand*, Vol. 2, 473 and Appendix.
13. Ibid. The Appendix gives a figure of 12,950.
14. Klein, "Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in japanischem Gewahrsam," 8; and Burdick, *German Prisoners in Japan*, xv, n. 6, provides a figure of 4,550.
15. Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender*, 3.
16. Jones, *Violence*; and Hinz, *Gefangen im Grossen Krieg*.
17. Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain*.
18. Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender*.
19. Rachamimov, "Disruptive Comforts of Drag"; and Rachamimov, "Camp Domesticity."
20. International Humanitarian Law Databases.
21. Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain*, 176.
22. Kewley Draskau, "Prisoners in Petticoats"; Rachamimov, "Disruptive Comforts of Drag"; and Rachamimov, "Camp Domesticity."
23. Jahr, "Forms and Functions"; and Panayi, "Work, Leisure and Sport."
24. Pöppinghege, *Im Lager Unbesiegt*; Wilkinson, "Captivity in Print"; and Schwan, "Periodicals"; and Schwan, "Gender, Irony and Humour."
25. Stibbe, "Barbed-wire Disease." See also Stibbe's contribution to Part II of this special issue.
26. The motivations of prisoners of other nationalities were similar. For example, Wilkinson, *British Prisoners*, 208–16, has analysed the motivations behind the activities of the British POWs in Germany.
27. Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender*, 106–35; and Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain*, 166–93.
28. Wilkinson, *British Prisoners*, 208–16.
29. Buckley, *German Prisoners*, 175.
30. Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender*, 114–6 discusses this in detail. He explains that German musical tradition was an important part of the German nationalist movement. Buckley, *German Prisoners*, 175–82, includes detailed accounts by POWs of the musical activities in the Skipton POW camp including some of the motivations behind the activities and their beneficial effects on the POWs. On nationalist sentiment, see also Mathis Gronau's contribution to Part I of this special issue.
31. Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender*, 128, 129, discusses this in detail.

32. Ibid., 112; and Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain*, 180.
33. Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender*, 112.
34. Ibid.
35. Buckley, *German Prisoners*, 11.
36. *Instructions and Rules of Guidance for the Conduct of Every German Soldier Who is Taken Prisoner* (translation), July 1918, The National Archives, ADM 137/3868; and Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender*, cover the German attitude to surrender in detail.
37. Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender*, 118–23.
38. Ibid.; and Buckley, *German Prisoners*, 235–45.
39. Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender*, 124–7; and Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain*, 176–80.
40. Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender*, 124–6.
41. Buckley, *German Prisoners*, 163.
42. See, for example, Winter, *The Day the Great War Ended*.
43. Kramer, *Deutsche Offiziere in Wakefield*, 59 (translated by Alison Abbey).
44. The terminology referring to subjects/programmes of study and the titles of institutions do not map neatly between German and English. Therefore, translations provided are often approximate.
45. Bogenstätter and Zimmermann, *Die Welt hinter Stacheldraht*, 164, 165.
46. Bauer et al, *Das Kriegsgefangenenlager Oswestry – Westlager*, 51–53.
47. Schreiner in Wurzer, “Die Kriegsgefangenen der Mittelmächte,” 202.
48. Bach, *Ausbildung der deutschen Internierten*, 25–31.
49. O.A.G. Communications Volume 17 (1914–1922): Appendix. ‘A short report on the activities in Bando Camp as far as they relate to East Asia.’ (translated by David Sutherland). Available at <http://bandobaracke.org/en/html/documentViewer.html?document=6>.
50. Berliner, *Organisation und Betrieb des Export-Geschäfts in China; Organisation und Betrieb des Import-Geschäfts in China; and Organisation und Betrieb des japanischen Importhandels*.
51. “A German Invasion,” *Craven Herald and Wensleydale Standard*, 18 January 1918. Confirmed by analysis of the arrival dates of POWs from the records of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Online at <https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/>.
52. Raw, *Bradford Pals*, 57–80.
53. Mark, *Prisoners of War in British Hands*, 217–34.
54. Buckley, *German Prisoners*, 5.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., 37, 212.
57. Ibid., 8.
58. Ibid., 160–212, 235–46.
59. Ibid., 160–73.
60. Ibid., 162, 163, 166–72.
61. Ibid., 172.
62. Ibid., 14.
63. Ibid., 163–6.
64. Ibid., 163.

65. Ibid., 138.
66. Ibid., 166.
67. Ibid., 165.
68. Ibid.
69. Bozkurt, "Evolving World," 307.
70. Redlich, "Academic Education for Business" (page 9 of references in electronic version), makes the point that the eighteenth-century word *Handelswissenschaften* was becoming obsolete at the beginning of the twentieth century.
71. Buckley, *German Prisoners*, 163, 166.
72. Markulis, "The Live Case Study," 168, 169, makes clear the distinction between the case study, the generic term, and the live case study. Both are fact-based methods for developing the decision-making skills of business students. The case study method, pioneered by Harvard Business School, involves an academic instructor, whereas the live case study is 'a more experientially-based pedagogy' with a knowledgeable employee as the instructor.
73. Buckley, *German Prisoners*, 165.
74. Ibid., 163.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid., 165 (added emphasis).
77. Ibid., 163.
78. Holden, "English in Multilingual European Economic Space," 41.
79. The authors have seen an English dictionary that belonged to one of the POWs – it is currently in the possession of his son in Buenos Aires.
80. Buckley, *German Prisoners*, 163.
81. Zhiltsova, "The Russian-German Customs War."
82. Buckley, *German Prisoners*, 164; and Treiber, *Rothschilds Taschenbuch*. It is not clear which edition the Skipton POWs used.
83. Buckley, *German Prisoners*, 164.
84. Ibid., 82.
85. Ibid., 174.
86. McKinley, "The Limits of Knowledge Management," 79; and Spender, "Nonaka and KM's Past, Present and Future," 27–31.
87. Holden, *Cross-Cultural Management*, 71.
88. Grant, "Nonaka's Dynamic Theory," 78.
89. Buckley, *German Prisoners*, 164.
90. Demarest, "Understanding Knowledge Management," 374 (added emphasis).
91. Buckley, *German Prisoners*, 165.
92. Nonaka and Takeuchi, *The Knowledge-Creating Company*. This book can be called the foundational text of KM. In the simplest terms the authors propound that knowledge creation in a company setting gives rise to continuous innovation, which in turn leads to competitive advantage. Significantly for the Skipton Camp, a major element in the knowledge creation process is socialisation.
93. Holden, *Cross-Cultural Management*, 315, defines atmosphere as 'a pervasive feeling, which is derived from experience and serves as a determinant of

expectations concerning future cooperation in a business relationship or group activity such as collaborative learning or knowledge-sharing’.

94. In his later work, Nonaka develops the notion of ‘an existential place where participants share their contexts and create new meanings through interactions’, (Nonaka and Toyama, ‘Knowledge-Creating Firm’, cited in Holden and Glisby, *Creating Knowledge Advantage*, 34). Applying this notion to a First World War POW camp is highly unusual.
95. Cruikshank, *A Delicate Experiment*, 18.
96. James, *A German Identity*, 64.
97. *Ibid.*, 68. James makes the important point that ‘the word *Kultur* has a broader meaning in German than in English . . . For Germans the word refers both to the products of artists and to *economic artefacts*’ (added emphasis), *ibid.*, 80.
98. Bellinger, “Betriebswirtschaftliches Denken,” 85.
99. Redlich, “Academic Education for Business,” 49; The only exception was the *Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule Aachen* (RWTH Aachen), which was founded in 1870 (<https://www.rwth-aachen.de/cms/root/die-rwth/aktuell/hochschuljubilaeum/~cjxtk/gruendung-und-entwicklung/>).
100. Watson, *The German Genius*, 31.
101. Redlich, “Academic Education for Business,” 49.
102. Zander, “Gründung der Handelshochschulen,” 61.
103. *Ibid.*, 224, 225.
104. Redlich, “Academic Education for Business,” 53.
105. Klein-Blenkers and Reiss, “Geschichte der Betriebswirtschaftslehre,” 1421.
106. *Ibid.*
107. Redlich, “Academic Education for Business,” 57.
108. Research into the pre- and post-war careers of the Skipton prisoners is still ongoing.
109. Redlich, “Academic Education for Business,” 55.
110. Copeland, *And Mark an Era*, 41.
111. Cruikshank, *A Delicate Experiment*, 42.
112. *Ibid.*
113. *Ibid.*, 25. Here Cruikshank reproduces a copy of such a case about freight rates on the American railroad.
114. *Ibid.*, 75.
115. Buckley, *German Prisoners*, 164.
116. *Ibid.*
117. *Ibid.*, 46, 57, 94, 270, 278. The German officers refer to the POW camp as a ‘(barbed-wire) cage’ on several occasions.
118. Keeble, *The Ability to Manage*, 94.
119. Wilson and Thomson, “The Making of Modern Management,” 45.
120. Wiener, *English Culture*, 24.
121. Klein-Blenkers and Riess, “Geschichte der Betriebswirtschaftslehre,” 1418.

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ORCID

Anne Buckley  <http://orcid.org/0009-0008-1958-4364>

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