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Decolonising management education: mechanisms for challenging colonial legacies and other intersecting hierarchies of knowledge in a neoliberal context

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ABSTRACT

Management education remains deeply entrenched in colonial and neoliberal epistemic traditions, and privileges Eurocentric managerial paradigms while marginalising alternative knowledge systems. This paper outlines two levels of decolonisation: (a) surface-level interventions that introduce non-Western perspectives without challenging dominant frameworks and (b) deep-level transformations that fundamentally restructure curricula, pedagogy and institutional priorities. Drawing on decolonial and critical management studies, we identify three key mechanisms through which management education reproduces colonial and neoliberal hierarchies: (1) epistemic colonialism, (2) the exclusion of decolonial management models, and (3) the hegemony of Anglo-American institutional frameworks. We propose a decolonial approach which integrates Indigenous, feminist, and Southern epistemologies and challenges the neoliberal metrics governing management education. We adopt a multilevel perspective, as disrupting the reproduction of coloniality and neoliberalism demands coordinated epistemic, curricular, and institutional interventions. We highlight that decolonisation must go beyond tokenism to dismantle the ideological apparatuses sustaining racial capitalism and global economic asymmetries. In this sense, business schools can serve as sites of epistemic justice, which would foster alternative economic rationalities rooted in sustainability, relationality, and communal well-being.

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Introduction

At a time when there is an extensive backlash against social justice and equality movements that seek to question, critique, and transform dominant management educational norms, considering the continued relevance of decolonisation is particularly timely and necessary as an act of scholarly defiance in support of overcoming key challenges facing management education (Ng et al. 2025). This article develops a critical, synthetic, and theory-building account of colonial and neoliberal hierarchies in management education. Methodologically, it adopts a narrative review approach. It does not seek to offer an exhaustive systematic review of the relevant literatures; instead, it brings

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into dialogue decolonial theory, critical management studies, and scholarship on racial capitalism, higher education governance, language politics, and alternative economic traditions to develop a multilevel account of the mechanisms that reproduce these hierarchies. We argue that without a systems-level understanding, all decolonial interventions are fated to be partial and ultimately reabsorbed by the very colonial and neoliberal architectures they aim to disrupt. We adopt a multilevel perspective because coloniality and neoliberalism are not confined to isolated domains; rather, they operate as systemic architectures reproduced across interrelated levels of knowledge, pedagogy, and institutional governance. While much of the existing literature has focused on curricular diversification or pedagogical reform, we argue that such efforts are insufficient if they fail to address the institutional mechanisms and epistemic hierarchies that sustain colonial and neoliberal dominance. Our concern, therefore, is to explain why reforms confined to one domain remain vulnerable to neutralisation when the epistemic, curricular, and institutional conditions of management education are unchanged. This urgency becomes particularly evident in the context of management education, a key terrain where colonial and neoliberal ideology are encoded, reproduced, and legitimised.

Decolonisation offers a theoretical and political framework for examining the persistence of colonial power within management education. In this article, the term refers to a historically grounded effort to unsettle the relations of power that organise the production, validation, and circulation of knowledge, together with the institutional arrangements that sustain them (Bağlama 2025; Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Quijano 2000; Yalkin and Özbilgin 2024). It therefore includes attention to epicolonial dynamics: contemporary relations and outcomes which are recognisably colonial even where their connection to formal colonial encounters is indirect (Kessi, Marks, and Ramugondo 2020). This understanding places epistemic reform within a wider field of colonial power and asks who is authorised to define legitimate knowledge, whose interests institutions serve, and which forms of social and economic organisation they recognise as credible (Gopal 2021; wa Thiong'o 1986).

This use of the term requires an explicit qualification. Tuck and Yang (2012), writing from settler-colonial contexts, warn that decolonisation cannot become a general metaphor for diversity, inclusion, social justice, or institutional improvement, as it is bound to material questions of land, sovereignty, dispossession, and Indigenous life. Their intervention establishes an important limit for the present argument. Curricular diversification, inclusive pedagogy, and the addition of marginalised perspectives may challenge colonial hierarchies, yet they do not in themselves amount to decolonisation. We describe them as decolonial interventions only where they contest the structures which authorise some knowledge systems while subordinating others. Even then, educational and epistemic reforms cannot substitute for the material and political claims at the centre of decolonial struggles.

Within management education, this distinction directs attention to the institutional political economy of business schools. Coloniality is reproduced through neoliberal systems of marketisation, rankings, accreditation, corporate partnership, employability, and English-language publication, which convert knowledge and education into competitive assets and can absorb decolonial language without redistributing authority or resources (Bamberger and Morris 2024; Kangas and Salmenniemi 2016; Low 2025; Olivier 2019). We therefore use 'decolonising management education' to describe an unfinished and contested orientation, not a completed institutional condition. Its substantive force depends on whether interventions alter epistemic authority, institutional incentives, resource allocation, and accountability to the communities and traditions invoked. Without such changes, decolonisation risks becoming a language of curricular diversification or institutional branding (Gopal 2021).

Decolonisation is approached as a reflexive scholarly commitment that entails interrogating the academic structures inhabited while advancing situated alternatives. In this context, management education emerges as a critical site of contestation. As a discipline forged in the crucible of industrial capitalism and imperial expansion, it codifies the logic of extraction, accumulation, and

racialized exploitation that undergird colonialism and neoliberalism (Bamberger and Morris 2024; Low 2025). Business and management schools often reproduce what Aníbal Quijano (2000) termed the coloniality of power, which privileges Eurocentric managerial frameworks that reduce the value of human labour to financial metrics, elevate shareholder supremacy, and erase Indigenous modes of exchange rooted in reciprocity and ecological balance. The curriculum's epistemological monoculture – its uncritical adherence to case studies valorising corporate expansion, continuous and unfettered growth, the unrivalled supremacy of markets, and its silencing of Southern theories of cooperative economics – exemplifies how education maintains the neoliberal status quo by having no real political impact, no real policy implications, nor on-the-ground change for citizens, and ultimately becomes a tool of neocolonial subject formation. This marginalisation of situated worldviews underscores the need to foreground contextual expertise as a valid and necessary form of knowledge in management education (Gümüşay and Amis 2021).

However, a number of global economic, social, and demographic shifts require management education to address the persistence of unfair and unethical management practices, ongoing mono-ethnic centring, silence in the face of fragility-in-action, contestations over power and narrative, and calls for constructive sustainability practices. Decolonising this field necessitates more than diversifying syllabi; it requires subverting the epistemic authority of capitalist modernity itself, centering pedagogies that reframe management as a site of ethical relation-building, resource stewardship, and communal sovereignty. Such a project interrogates the very notion of management as a universal category, exposing its colonial origins and reimagining its potential within pluriversal futures untethered from the growth imperatives of racial capitalism (Adefila et al. 2022). Racial capitalism is a system where racial hierarchies are integral to economic accumulation, structuring labour exploitation, resource distribution, and wealth disparities. The article's principal contribution lies in demonstrating that the decolonisation of management education cannot be evaluated solely in terms of curricular representation (cf. Baykut et al. 2022). We identify three mutually reinforcing mechanisms that sustain colonial and neoliberal hierarchies: epistemic colonialism, the marginalisation of decolonial management models, and the hegemony of Anglo-American institutional frameworks. By integrating these mechanisms within a multilevel framework, we distinguish surface-level interventions, which expand representation while leaving existing structures of authority largely intact, from deep-level transformations, which redistribute epistemic authority and alter curricular and institutional priorities. The article first examines the colonial and neoliberal formation of management education, then analyses the three mechanisms that reproduce its dominant hierarchies, and finally develops surface- and deep-level interventions across epistemic, curricular, and institutional domains. Figure 1 presents this framework schematically.

Methods

Review design and scope

We adopt a critical narrative review methodology (Grant and Booth 2009). A critical stance provides a reading of uneven relations of power in any given literature. A narrative approach was selected because scholarship relevant to the decolonisation of management education is dispersed across decolonial and postcolonial theory, critical management studies, racial capitalism, feminist economics, higher education studies, language research, Indigenous epistemologies, and critiques of neoliberal governance. Narrative reviews are particularly suitable for integrating conceptually diverse literatures and developing theoretical accounts across disciplinary boundaries (Hammersley 2001; Hodgkinson and Ford 2014). The interdisciplinary scope of the article was also informed by decolonial approaches to relational and transdisciplinary knowledge production, which emphasise the situated character of scholarly inquiry and the need to engage epistemological traditions that transcend established disciplinary boundaries (Tyman and Bishop 2023).

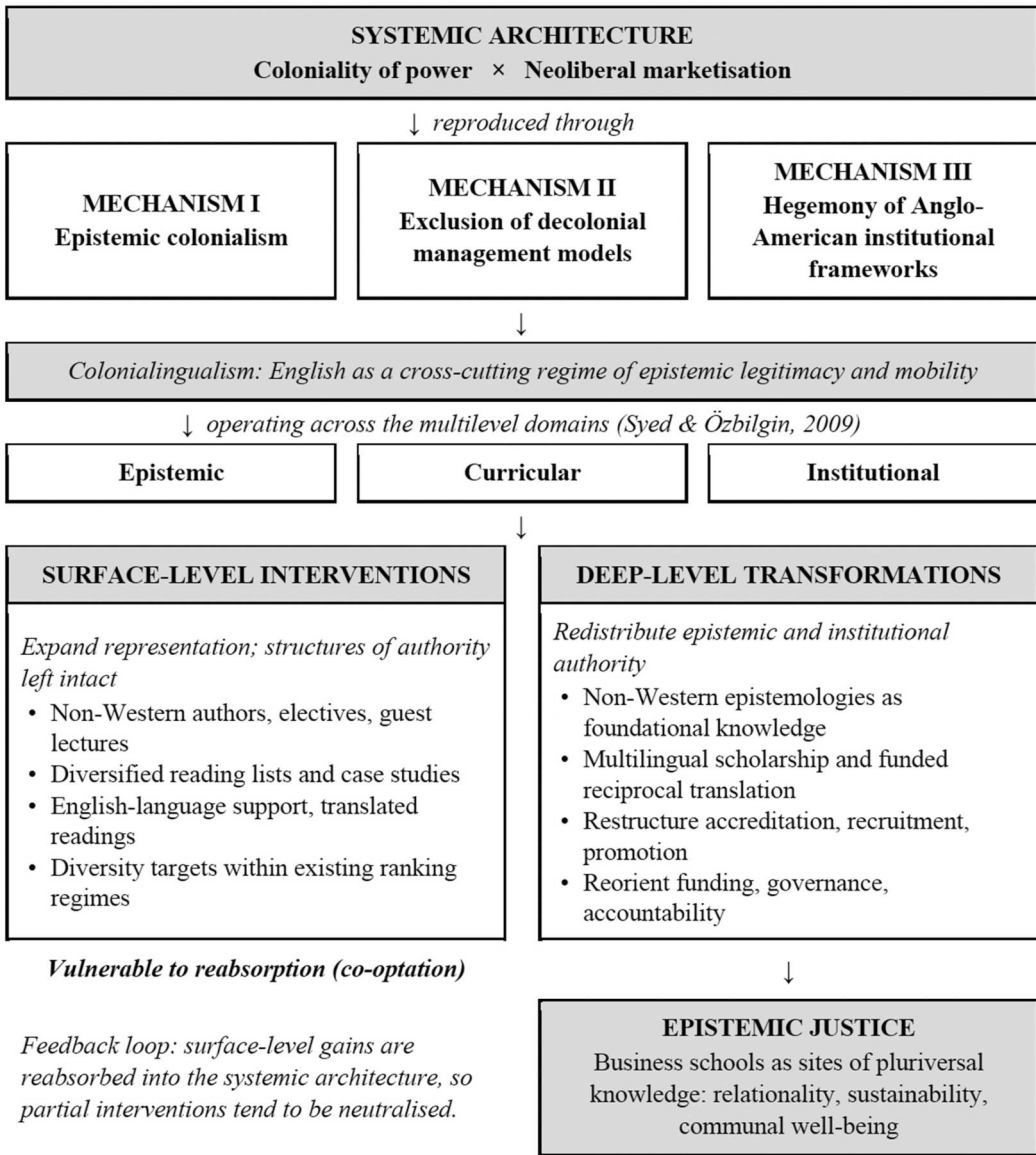


Figure 1. A multilevel framework for decolonising management education.

The literature examined encompassed several related bodies of scholarship. Foundational accounts of coloniality and epistemic domination provided the principal theoretical orientation (de Sousa Santos 2017; Mignolo 2011; Quijano 2000; wa Thiong'o 1986), whereas critical management and political-economic scholarship connected these debates to capitalism, organisation, and management knowledge (Banerjee 2003; Brown 2015; Harvey 2005; Robinson 1983). Research on the marketisation of higher education, publication hierarchies, curricular exclusion, and the institutional organisation of business education further informed the analysis (Boyacigiller and Adler 1991; Chatterji, Rameshwar, and Kiran 2022; Minefee et al. 2018; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). Decolonial methodological scholarship contributed to the article's attention to epistemic plurality, situated knowledge, and the limits of universalising frameworks (Erbil and San Keskin 2026; Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Özbilgin, Erbil, and Groutsis 2026).

The purpose of the critical narrative review was to synthesise these bodies of scholarship around two concerns: the mechanisms that reproduce colonial and neoliberal hierarchies in management education, and the distinction between interventions that broaden representation within existing arrangements and transformations that alter epistemic, curricular, and institutional authority. The article does not seek exhaustive evidence aggregation or a comprehensive bibliometric account of the relevant fields. Management education was the central object of analysis, while sources from adjacent disciplines were included where they illuminated its intellectual foundations, institutional structures, or possible alternatives.

Search strategy and source selection

The initial searches were conducted in Scopus and Google Scholar between January and December 2025. The principal search combinations paired ‘management education’, ‘business education’, and ‘business schools’ with ‘decolonisation’, ‘coloniality’, ‘postcolonialism’, ‘neoliberalism’, ‘racial capitalism’, and ‘epistemic injustice’. Further searches combined these educational terms with ‘Indigenous knowledge’, ‘Southern epistemologies’, ‘Ubuntu’, ‘buen vivir’, ‘degrowth’, ‘English-medium instruction’, ‘linguistic imperialism’, ‘coloniallingualism’, ‘accreditation’, ‘academic rankings’, and ‘faculty recruitment’. The searches were organised around three broad clusters of literature. The first addressed coloniality, neoliberalism, racial capitalism, epistemic injustice, and the historical formation of management knowledge. The second examined intellectual and economic traditions marginalised within mainstream management education, including Ubuntu, buen vivir, Indigenous stewardship, feminist economics, and degrowth (Cossa 2023; Kallis, Kerschner, and Martinez-Alier 2012; Kessi, Marks, and Ramugondo 2020; Marcone 2015; Tomas 2011). The third concerned institutional mechanisms that regulate epistemic legitimacy, including accreditation, academic recruitment and promotion, publishing hierarchies, English-language dominance, and coloniallingualism (Deumert and Storch 2020; Kumar 2019; Meighan 2023). This organisation guided source selection and preserved the historical, political, and ontological differences among the traditions considered.

The database searches were supplemented by backward citation tracing from foundational contributions, forward citation searches for subsequent work engaging with these sources, and readings identified through scholarly recommendations. These procedures were particularly useful for locating monographs, chapters in edited collections, and contextually situated scholarship that may be less visible in major bibliographic databases. Sources identified outside the database searches were assessed according to the same relevance criteria. This combination of structured searching, citation tracing, and interdisciplinary synthesis was informed by earlier narrative-review research that brought distinct theoretical traditions into dialogue around a shared analytical problem (cf. Mergen and Özbilgin 2021).

Sources were included when they made a substantive conceptual, historical, or empirical contribution to one or more of four areas: the colonial or neoliberal formation of management knowledge; the epistemic, curricular, or institutional reproduction of these hierarchies; economic and managerial traditions marginalised within mainstream management education; or interventions directed towards decolonial transformation. The article draws on peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly monographs, chapters in edited collections, and selected publications produced by educational, accreditation, or professional institutions. Institutional and professional publications were used to document or illustrate contemporary practices and were not assigned the same evidentiary status as peer-reviewed theoretical or empirical scholarship. On the other hand, sources were excluded when they addressed diversity, internationalisation, or responsible management without substantive engagement with coloniality, neoliberalism, epistemic hierarchy, or their institutional consequences. Works whose relevance to management education or higher education could not be established were also excluded. Sources that substantially duplicated arguments already represented in the selected literature were retained only where they provided additional conceptual, empirical, historical, or geographical specificity. No journal-ranking threshold was applied, since

restricting the literature to highly ranked journals would risk reproducing the publication hierarchies examined in the article at the expense of delegitimising indigenous contributions which are vulnerable to such epistemic exclusion through a hierarchical reading.

Foundational theoretical works were included without a lower publication-date boundary, while the search for contemporary scholarship covered material available up to December 2025. We conducted the database searches in English, although the analysis incorporated scholarship addressing diverse geographical, linguistic, and epistemic contexts. We recognise that this linguistic boundary may limit access to relevant work published outside English-language academic circuits. This limitation is particularly significant given the article's concern with linguistic and epistemic hierarchy.

Analytical procedure

The selected literature was examined through an iterative process of thematic comparison and theoretical synthesis. Attention was given to each source's disciplinary location, geographical or institutional context, conception of coloniality or neoliberalism, principal mechanism of reproduction, level of operation, proposed intervention, and any recognised risk of appropriation or institutional co-optation. It enabled comparison across distinct intellectual traditions without presenting Indigenous, Southern, feminist, religious, cooperative, and ecological approaches as interchangeable.

Syed and Özbilgin's (2009) multilevel framework provided the initial analytical orientation by directing attention to the interaction among epistemic, curricular, and institutional domains. These domains served as sensitising categories, whereas the specific mechanisms were refined through repeated comparison across the selected literature. The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, we identified recurring accounts of the colonial and neoliberal formation of management knowledge and education. Second, we compared the processes described across the literature and consolidated them into three interlocking mechanisms: epistemic colonialism, the exclusion and marginalisation of decolonial management models, and the hegemony of Anglo-American institutional frameworks. These mechanisms were retained because each identified a distinct site at which colonial and neoliberal authority is reproduced while also revealing its dependence on the other two. Third, the proposed interventions were examined according to the form and extent of change they entailed. Interventions were classified as surface-level when they expanded representation, diversified examples, or introduced additional perspectives while leaving existing structures of epistemic and institutional authority largely intact. They were classified as deep-level transformations when they challenged the rules governing curricular legitimacy, knowledge evaluation, accreditation, recruitment, resource distribution, or institutional accountability. The distinction between surface- and deep-level interventions therefore concerns the distribution of epistemic and institutional authority, not simply the number or geographical origin of the perspectives included.

The analysis proceeded through iterative cycles of review and reconstitution, during which preliminary categories were reconsidered as additional sources, contexts, and contrasting positions were examined. The movement between individual texts and the developing conceptual framework followed a hermeneutic process of interpretation and revision. The article follows the resulting analytical sequence: it first establishes the colonial and neoliberal formation of management education, then examines the three mechanisms that reproduce its dominant hierarchies, and finally develops surface- and deep-level interventions across epistemic, curricular, and institutional domains.

Positionality and reflexivity

The author team represents the disciplinary and epistemic topography of the article from intellectual formations that span postcolonial and literary studies, linguistics, organisation and

management studies, diversity management, and management education. This composition bears on the argument advanced here, since the account of coloniallingualism and epistemic hierarchy is informed by linguistic and literary scholarship as much as by organisational critique. These institutional and disciplinary locations do not constitute a single or stable Global North or Global South standpoint. Instead, they position us unevenly within academic systems shaped by colonial histories, unequal access to resources, English-language publishing, journal rankings, accreditation regimes, and differentiated forms of institutional prestige.

Our analysis is informed by a relational and decolonial onto-epistemic stance. We understand knowledge as situated, historically constituted, and inseparable from the institutional and political conditions of its production (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). We therefore do not approach coloniality and neoliberalism as objects external to our own academic practice or from a position of scholarly neutrality. The article is produced from within university systems that reproduce many of the hierarchies under examination. Our institutional affiliations, access to international scholarly networks, and ability to publish in English provide forms of academic authority and mobility. At the same time, these advantages are unevenly distributed across the team, and our work remains conditioned by academic systems in which locally grounded knowledge frequently has to be translated into dominant Anglo-American concepts and publication conventions in order to gain wider recognition.

English is the language of this article and the principal medium of its intended international circulation, although it is not the first language of all authors. This positioning gives us access to English-dominant scholarly debates while simultaneously constraining the range of knowledge that can be encountered, cited, and represented. The English-language boundary of the searches therefore constitutes a methodological and epistemic limitation, particularly for an article concerned with coloniallingualism and the authority assigned to knowledge expressed in dominant academic languages.

We do not claim to speak on behalf of Indigenous communities, Global South populations, or the intellectual traditions examined in the article. Ubuntu, buen vivir, kaitiakitanga, Islamic finance, feminist economics, degrowth, and cooperative traditions arise from distinct historical, political, cultural, and geographical conditions. We approach them as situated bodies of knowledge, not as interchangeable alternatives or as resources available for extraction and transfer into management curricula. Where such scholarship was available within the literature examined, we sought to engage work produced within, situated in relation to, or developed through sustained engagement with the communities and traditions concerned. The analysis also attends to the risks of decontextualisation, institutional appropriation, and the conversion of decolonial knowledge into academic or organisational branding.

Such positional commitments informed the review design and analytical process. They shaped the decision not to use journal rankings as a criterion of scholarly value, the inclusion of monographs and contextually grounded scholarship alongside journal articles, the differentiation of the traditions examined, and the attention given to the institutional co-optation of decolonial interventions. Positionality is therefore treated as an element of analytical accountability, not as a claim to epistemic innocence or an assumption that reflexivity can fully resolve the contradictions in which the article itself is implicated.

The colonial legacy of management education

The modern discipline of management education is shaped by its colonial genealogies, which manifest in three interrelated dimensions: (1) epistemic colonialism (Özkazanç-Pan 2008), (2) the exclusion of decolonial management models (Sihela and April 2025a), and (3) the hegemony of Anglo-American institutional frameworks (Boyacigiller and Adler 1991). At the epistemic level, the foundational frameworks of mainstream management theories are entwined with the historical processes of European colonial expansion and the emergence of racial capitalism. These intellectual

traditions are not only abstract or neutral constructs; they are historically situated and ideologically charged, reflecting and reinforcing the material conditions of their production. Adam Smith's (1776) seminal work, *The Wealth of Nations*, for instance, is celebrated as a cornerstone of classical economics, yet its articulation of market self-regulation and the division of labour needs to be understood within the context of an eighteenth-century world order predicated on colonial exploitation, enslavement, and the extraction of resources from the Global South. Smith's theorisation of the invisible hand as a natural mechanism for economic harmony obscures the violent realities of dispossession and coercion that enabled capital accumulation during this period. Similarly, Frederick Taylor's (1919) principles of scientific management, which sought to optimise labour efficiency through mechanistic models, indicate a dehumanising logic that reduces workers to interchangeable units of productivity. Taylorism, while a technical innovation, is ideological in its treatment of labour as a commodified input, divorced from the social, cultural, and ecological contexts that shape human existence. Henry Ford's (1922) assembly line extended this fragmentation of labour, confining workers to repetitive and specialised tasks; however, the expansion of mass production was deeply reliant on colonial supply chains, such as rubber extracted under brutal conditions in the Congo. Often forgotten is that during World War II the Allied Powers (including European nations) relied heavily on African resources (like tin, columbite, and others) and, following the war, Africa's extractive industries played a crucial role in supporting European reconstruction and economic recovery with Africa's mineral resources and European companies and investors expanding their operations to tap into the continent's mineral wealth, with uneven impact for Africans (Dumett 1985).

David Ricardo's (1817) theory of comparative advantage, which argues that nations should specialise in producing goods they make most efficiently, overlooks how colonial powers imposed economic specialisation on their colonies. These powers structured economies around cash crop production in India and mineral extraction in Africa while suppressing industrialisation and beneficiation in Africa. Such externally enforced dependence persisted post-independence, maintaining neocolonial hierarchies and hindering economic self-sufficiency. The Washington Consensus further entrenched this dynamic in the late twentieth century, as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank prioritised debt repayment over public welfare, enforcing privatisation, austerity, and liberalisation, and it subsequently dismantled social safety nets and preserved economic dependency under the guise of development (Wheeldon and Sahay 2025). Milton Friedman's (1962) neoliberal economic agenda, popularised through the Chicago School, functioned as a modern iteration of economic dispossession under the pretence of market efficiency. His advocacy for deregulation and privatisation directly influenced Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in the 1980s and 1990s, forcing Global South nations to open markets and sell public assets to foreign corporations and investors. Such policies, framed as free-market solutions, concealed the coercion of debt regimes that exacerbated poverty and deepened global inequalities, perpetuating colonial economic subjugation through financial instruments rather than direct control.

Max Weber's (1904–1905/1930) thesis on the Protestant work ethic similarly served to naturalise capitalist expansion, attributing it to European cultural traits such as thrift and discipline while ignoring the material foundations of wealth accumulation, such as colonial conquest, resource extraction, and enslaved labour, which legitimised structural inequalities as reflections of cultural superiority rather than historical violence (Zimmerman 2006). John Locke's (1689) theory of property rights further justified colonial expansion, arguing that land ownership was contingent upon improvement. This logic enabled settler colonialism in the Americas, Southern Africa and Australia, where Indigenous land practices were deemed unproductive, justifying legal frameworks that sanctioned dispossession and erased non-European models of land stewardship. Racial hierarchies have also shaped management theories, as evidenced in the early twentieth-century fusion of scientific management with eugenics (Hodorovská and Rankovová 2024). Managerial theories endorsed racialized labour divisions by portraying specific populations as biologically suited for menial work, rationalising exploitative systems in plantations, mines, and industrial settings (Esch and Roediger 2009).

The persistence of these ideological frameworks highlights how supposedly neutral economic models remain embedded in colonial histories of capital accumulation and governance. Similarly, the neoclassical economic ideal of *homo economicus* entrenches epistemic violence by positing hyper-individualism and self-maximisation as the normative model of human behaviour. It assumes rationality, self-interest, and utility maximisation as universal traits, a theoretical justification for prioritising profit and exclusion over communal well-being and ecological sustainability (Banerjee 2022). We have to ask: whom does these management theories serve and benefit, whom does it centre, what practices does it encourage, and what outcomes does it serve to uphold? Practices that emphasise solidarity, cooperation or reciprocity, and plurality are dismissed as inefficient or primitive within this framework, echoing colonial discourses that framed non-European societies as backward or undeveloped. As it is institutionalised through textbooks, case studies, accreditation standards, and publication credentials, the epistemic architecture of management education perpetuates this ideological project - which renders it 'sticky' (Bourdieu 1993). The presentation of the Western capitalist model as a neutral and objective framework for understanding economic activity is thus not incidental but constitutive of the field's epistemological foundations, which continue to reproduce the power relations central to colonial conquest - between capital and labour, coloniser, and colonised, centre and periphery. In doing so, management theory, in its current form, seems to foreclose the possibility of imagining alternative economic systems prioritising equity, sustainability, and collective flourishing.

The exclusion of knowledge traditions outside dominant Anglo-American management thought should not be understood as the marginalisation of a single and coherent category of 'non-Western' knowledge. The traditions considered here emerge from different historical conditions, political struggles, ontologies, and institutional forms. Some are Indigenous and land-based; some arise from anti-colonial, religious, feminist, ecological, or cooperative movements; and others developed within European critiques of capitalist organisation. Their critical value therefore lies in their specificity, not in their collective classification as alternatives to the West. *Ubuntu*, for example, emerges from Southern African philosophical traditions centred on relational personhood and communal existence, and challenges the atomised individualism of neoliberal management (Cossa 2023; Sihela and April 2025b). *Buen vivir* is rooted in Andean Indigenous and political traditions that connect collective well-being, ecological relations, and critiques of development, although its incorporation into state and institutional discourse has also generated debate over appropriation and depoliticisation (Marcone 2015). *Māori kaitiakitanga* articulates responsibilities of stewardship, intergenerational obligation, and reciprocal relations with land, but it cannot be detached from Māori sovereignty and treated simply as a transferable model of environmental management (McAllister, Hikuroa, and Macinnis-Ng 2023; Tomas 2011). These traditions share a critique of extractive individualism, yet they are not interchangeable and cannot be reduced to general principles of relationality or sustainability.

Other traditions examined in the article arise from different intellectual and political projects. Islamic finance is grounded in Islamic jurisprudential and ethical debates concerning interest, risk, obligation, and distributive justice; it should not be treated as an Indigenous epistemology or as inherently external to capitalism. Gandhian economics emerged from anti-colonial struggles in India and emphasises self-sufficiency, restraint, decentralisation, and ethical consumption (Giri 2004). Degrowth, by contrast, developed largely within European ecological economics as a critique of growth-dependent economies and excessive material throughput (Kallis, Kerschner, and Martinez-Alier 2012). Its application to the Global South remains contested where limits to growth are discussed without sufficient attention to colonial extraction, unequal development, and differentiated material needs. Nordic cooperative models originate in particular histories of labour organisation, social democracy, and welfare-state development; they therefore cannot be presented as universally transferable substitutes for shareholder capitalism. Feminist economics adds a further and distinct critique by exposing the exclusion of care, reproductive labour, and social reproduction from dominant accounts of economic value. Cooperative systems such as the Igbo apprenticeship

model, Ghanaian *susu* institutions, and Latin American solidarity economies are likewise embedded in specific social histories and relations of trust, reciprocity, kinship, and collective organisation (Esteves 2014; Hossein and Bonsu 2023; Ikwuegbu et al. 2020). Their inclusion in management education should preserve these contexts instead of extracting isolated principles for use as managerial techniques.

These traditions also contain internal tensions and are vulnerable to co-optation. Ubuntu may be repackaged as a generic style of corporate leadership; *buen vivir* and Indigenous stewardship may be incorporated into sustainability branding without recognition of land, sovereignty, or political struggle; Islamic finance may reproduce conventional financial practices under different contractual forms; and cooperative models may be celebrated whereas questions of gender, hierarchy, exclusion, or unequal participation remain unexamined. Degrowth may also reproduce Northern universalism if it fails to distinguish between economies organised around overconsumption and those shaped by deprivation or colonial extraction. The purpose of engaging these traditions is therefore not to idealise them or assemble them into a unified counter-canon, but to examine the distinct challenges they pose to the epistemic and economic assumptions of management education while remaining attentive to their limits, contradictions, and conditions of appropriation (Laasch et al. 2020).

The globalisation of management education has functioned less as a dynamic exchange of cross-cultural knowledge than as a mechanism of ideological homogenisation, with Anglo-American pedagogical frameworks positioned as the universal standard for world-class accreditation. This epistemic hegemony is exemplified by the Harvard Business School case-study model, institutionalised in the early twentieth century, which enshrines US-centric corporate narratives as global benchmarks (Kumar 2019). By constructing entities such as Ford, Goldman Sachs, and Google as archetypes of entrepreneurial success, these case studies implicitly validate the logic of neoliberalism and shareholder primacy while obscuring the colonial legacies – from the rubber plantations of Belgian Congo and Ford's failed *Fordlândia* project to the cobalt mines of the Democratic Republic of Congo and bauxite extraction in Guinea – that historically enabled Western corporate ascendancy. Such selective framing marginalises alternative models that challenge the dominant narratives of success and development. For example, MBA programmes in India frequently employ case studies on Silicon Valley unicorns over critiques of Amul's (2025) dairy cooperatives, a 75-year-old model empowering 3.6 million farmers, while Nigerian curricula neglect the Igba Boi apprenticeship system, a centuries-old Igbo practice fostering intergenerational entrepreneurship through shared-risk capital (Ikwuegbu et al. 2020), and global Business Schools rarely include the Sustainable Oil Palm Growers Cooperatives (KPSM) of Malaysia in their curricula – cooperatives which model constructive smallholder farmers support (even with small farms and scattered locations), governance systems for sharing resources, and sustainable palm oil production (The Edge Mayasia 2023).

Accreditation regimes such as AACSB and EQUIS institutionalise the hierarchy by incentivising conformity to US pedagogical norms, prioritising faculty trained at Ivy League US institutions and politics, privileging publication in English language Western journals, such as the elite journals of the Academy of Management, and dismissing non-Western pedagogies as anecdotal or non-rigorous (Thind and Yakavenka 2023). It creates an incentive structure wherein scholars in the Global South, such as those examining Ghanaian *susu* collectives (Hossein and Bonsu 2023) or Indonesia's *gotong royong* mutual aid networks (Slikkerveer 2019), face pressure to redirect their research through Eurocentric theoretical lenses to achieve academic legitimacy. The consequence is a form of cognitive extractivism (Alcoff 2022): Southern institutions become conduits for reproducing Western intellectual paradigms, producing graduates fluent in the jargon of neoliberal efficiency yet alienated from localised economic ecosystems and societal challenges.

Language constitutes a further mechanism through which colonial and neoliberal hierarchies are reproduced in management education (Śliwa 2008). Meghan's (2023) concept of colonialingualism

identifies the persistence of colonial assumptions within contemporary language regimes, particularly where English is treated as a neutral medium of international communication while functioning as a measure of intellectual authority, institutional quality, and academic legitimacy. The issue therefore extends beyond individual language proficiency. English structures the conditions under which knowledge becomes publishable, teachable, mobile, and recognisable as theory; scholarship articulated in other languages is, on the other hand, more readily positioned as local, informal, or insufficiently generalisable (Deumert and Storch 2020; Erbil, Özbilgin, and Bağlama 2023). Coloniallingualism operates across interconnected institutional domains. Publication in elite English-language journals shapes recruitment, promotion, and access to international scholarly networks; English-medium instruction is associated with global mobility and institutional prestige; and internationalisation and ranking systems reward universities able to demonstrate participation in Anglophone academic circuits (Kamasak and Özbilgin 2021). Such arrangements place scholars and institutions outside dominant English-speaking contexts under pressure to translate locally grounded knowledge into Anglo-American theoretical vocabularies and publication conventions. Translation in this context is not merely linguistic. It can also involve conceptual recoding, in which situated categories, histories, and practices are made intelligible according to assumptions already authorised within mainstream management scholarship. The result is an asymmetrical circulation of knowledge. Economic and managerial traditions such as Latin America's *economía solidaria* and Japan's *kyosei* may enter international management discourse only after being detached from their linguistic, historical, and political contexts (Esteves 2014; Kaku 1997). Similarly, the transplantation of Anglo-American curricula through international branch campuses and globally standardised business programmes can associate educational quality with proximity to Anglophone institutional models while marginalising locally grounded concepts and pedagogies (Bamberger and Morris 2024; Kumar 2019). Coloniallingualism therefore does not simply privilege English as a language; it regulates which knowledge can circulate internationally, which institutions acquire prestige, and which intellectual traditions must undergo translation before they are recognised as legitimate.

Management education has other entrenched forms of hierarchies of knowledge across social fault lines such as gender- (İlhan, Erbil, and Barsbay 2025), ethnicity- (Minefee et al. 2018), class- (Zulfiqar and Prasad 2021), and sexual orientation-based (Steyaert 2022) knowledge hierarchies. These knowledge hierarchies serve to disconnect individuals from themselves, their lived experiences, their contexts, and their environments. In this paper, we focus on neocolonial knowledge hierarchies that intersect with other hierarchies of knowledge in management education.

Theorising decolonising management education

A crucial step in decolonising the content of management programmes requires more than inserting token references to international authors and alternative perspectives; it entails a systematic integration of non-Western frameworks into the core of the curriculum. Interventions that seek to decolonise management education operate either at the surface level, focusing mainly on easy wins and short-term changes, or at the deep level, with long-term, meaningful, and sustainable outcomes of decolonising management education. After reviewing the extant literature for surface-level interventions, we elaborate and theorise deep-level interventions for decolonising management education.

Epistemic decolonising

At the surface level, decolonising course outlines might situate canonical authors, such as Adam Smith (1776) or Milton Friedman (1962), within their historical contexts of colonialism and racial capitalism and analyze how those conditions shaped foundational theories of markets and firm

behaviour. Modules in finance or strategy could devote equal attention to models arising from Indigenous knowledge systems or solidarity networks and stress how reciprocity, ecological respect, and community engagement constitute legitimate economic logics, which would involve assigning contemporary texts from the Global South that explore topics like cooperative governance, communal land tenure, and degrowth strategies. A surface-level example would be a business ethics module featuring a lecture on African Ubuntu philosophy alongside mainstream Western theories (Sihela and April 2025b). For example, King's Business School at King's College London (Everett 2023) has undertaken projects where students explore Indigenous management theories, analyzing how management thought has historically addressed environmental concerns and integrating non-Western perspectives into business curricula.

At a deeper level, such texts would be presented not as supplementary or anecdotal but as theoretically robust contributions that challenge the universal validity of free-market capitalism. The curriculum would be restructured to engage distinct Indigenous, Southern, anti-colonial, feminist, religious, cooperative, and ecological traditions as contextually grounded bodies of knowledge, not as interchangeable supplements to a Western canon.. Revamping management strategy courses may centre on relational ontologies such as *buen vivir* (Latin America) and *kaitiakitanga* (Māori) (McAllister, Hikuroa, and Macinnis-Ng 2023) as valid strategic frameworks. The University of Hawaii integrates place-based teaching approaches that embed local Indigenous knowledge and Hawaiian cultural perspectives into STEM curricula and research, connecting learning to the local environment and community (National Science Foundation 2024).

Inclusion of decolonial management models

Educators would revisit established concepts, for instance, efficiency or innovation, to reveal how their current usage is steeped in assumptions about growth and commodification. This would provide a surface-level critique of the colonial foundations of management models. In parallel, syllabi would expand beyond standard Western case studies and incorporate detailed narratives of local and regional enterprises that illustrate how diverse values and cultural traditions can lead to business success. Surface level engagement may be achieved by using examples of community-owned enterprises in Latin America as supplementary materials in entrepreneurship courses. Boston University has recognized the gap in integrating Indigenous knowledge into its curriculum, with 49% of respondents indicating it was not well at all integrated, highlighting the need to include Indigenous perspectives (Kostina 2024).

Decolonial engagement with management models may entail reorienting management education towards relational and cooperative economic models, replacing profit maximisation with sustainability and community well-being. Examples of such efforts include embedding Indigenous cooperative management systems like Igbo apprenticeship networks in core finance and business management courses and teaching them as standard models alongside capitalism. Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business, rooted in Jesuit traditions, emphasises the common good, integrating faith-based values into its curriculum to promote sustainable practices and societal impact (Jack 2024).

Decolonising institutional frameworks and the risk of co-optation

Decolonising management education might necessitate fundamentally restructuring institutional frameworks and accreditation mechanisms to dismantle entrenched colonial and neoliberal logic. Prevailing evaluative metrics, such as post-graduation income levels, faculty publication records in highly ranked Western-centric journals, and the cultivation of corporate partnerships, reproduce epistemic hierarchies that privilege market-driven imperatives over social transformation. Surface-level efforts to dismantle colonial institutional frameworks may include introducing diversity requirements in faculty hiring but maintaining a ranking system that privileges Ivy League-trained

scholars (Özbilgin 2009). The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) discusses the need for business schools to address racial injustices and decolonise curricula, suggesting steps like broadening reading lists and changing language. The institutional adoption of decolonial language does not necessarily produce decolonial change. Within marketised higher education, curricular diversification, responsible-management initiatives, sustainability commitments, and public statements on inclusion may become forms of institutional branding that enhance reputation without altering existing structures of authority, evaluation, or resource distribution (Bamberger and Morris 2024; Chatterji, Rameshwar, and Kiran 2022; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). Business schools may introduce decolonial electives, expand reading lists, or promote engagement with Indigenous and Global South perspectives while continuing to prioritise rankings, accreditation, graduate salaries, corporate partnerships, employability, and publication in elite English-language journals. Under these conditions, decolonial critique is translated into the managerial language of innovation, global competence, or responsible leadership, whereas its challenge to shareholder primacy, extractive economic practices, and institutional hierarchy is weakened. English-medium education may operate similarly when it is presented as a route to international mobility while also functioning as a marketable product that reinforces the authority of Anglophone knowledge systems (Kamasak and Özbilgin 2021).

Language reform illustrates the distinction between surface- and deep-level intervention. Providing academic English support, adding translated readings, or permitting occasional multilingual classroom activities may widen participation, but these measures leave colonialingual structures intact when publication, recruitment, promotion, accreditation, and institutional prestige continue to be governed primarily by English-language outputs. Deeper transformation would require the formal recognition of multilingual scholarship, translation as a funded and reciprocal scholarly practice, and evaluation systems that do not require locally grounded knowledge to be reformulated within dominant Anglo-American vocabularies before it can acquire legitimacy. Such change would also involve recognising that concepts developed in different languages may not possess direct English equivalents and should not be treated as deficient for resisting conceptual assimilation.

Avoiding such co-optation requires changes to the institutional rules that determine authority, recognition, and resource allocation. A decolonial approach therefore demands the recalibration of evaluative standards in favour of indicators that recognise contributions to income redistribution, social justice, community engagement, ecological sustainability, and cooperative forms of economic organisation. To actualise this shift, accreditation bodies might integrate the epistemic agency of Indigenous leaders, grassroots organisers, and scholars from historically marginalised regions, ensuring that diverse and pluralistic ontologies shape evaluative frameworks. Institutions might be recognised not solely for their alignment with global capital but for their substantive engagements with local economies through student-led social enterprises, participatory action research, and the co-production of knowledge with disenfranchised communities. Furthermore, governance structures might be reconstituted to challenge hegemonic hiring and promotion criteria, valuing community-based scholarship, critical praxis, and intellectual labour that fosters inclusive and reflexive academic spaces. By reorienting institutional incentives towards social accountability, ecological sustainability, and epistemic justice, management schools might transcend profit-maximisation imperatives and cultivate a pedagogical model that is emancipatory, relational, and attuned to global equity and sustainability imperatives (Skelton 2024). The University of Alaska's Alaska Native Knowledge Network has undertaken efforts to integrate Indigenous knowledge systems into education, aiming to restore and respect Indigenous ways of knowing within academic frameworks (Barnhardt 2008). The distinction between surface- and deep-level intervention therefore depends on whether an initiative merely increases institutional visibility or changes decision-making authority, funding priorities, evaluation criteria, and accountability. Table 1 below outlines the pillars of colonisation, the level of decolonisation, and counter-intervention for decolonisation with concrete examples.

Table 1. Mechanisms of colonisation in management education and levels of decolonial intervention.

Pillar of Colonisation in Management Education	Level of Decolonisation	Counter-Intervention	Concrete Example
Epistemic Colonialism	Surface	Incorporating non-Western thinkers in optional modules without challenging dominant frameworks.	A business ethics module featuring a single lecture on African Ubuntu philosophy alongside mainstream Western theories.
	Deep	Restructuring the curriculum to include non-Western epistemologies as foundational knowledge, rather than supplementary.	Revamping business strategy courses to centre relational ontologies such as buen vivir (Latin America) and kaitiakitanga (Māori) as valid strategic frameworks.
Exclusion of Decolonial Management Models	Surface	Introducing case studies on alternative economic models, such as cooperatives or Indigenous trade networks, within existing courses.	Using examples of community-owned enterprises in Latin America as supplementary materials in entrepreneurship courses.
	Deep	Reorienting management education towards relational and cooperative economic models, replacing profit-maximisation with sustainability and community well-being.	Embedding Indigenous cooperative management systems like Igbo apprenticeship networks in core finance and business courses, teaching them as standard models alongside capitalism.
Hegemony of Anglo-American Institutional Frameworks	Surface	Adopting decolonial language, elective courses, diversified reading lists, and responsible-management initiatives without changing accreditation standards, institutional incentives, promotion criteria, funding priorities, governance structures, or corporate partnership arrangements.	A business school publicises a decolonial curriculum initiative and introduces diversity requirements in faculty recruitment while continuing to privilege rankings, graduate salaries, corporate partnerships, elite English-language publications, and qualifications from high-status Anglo-American institutions.
	Deep	Redesigning accreditation, governance, recruitment, promotion, funding, and partnership criteria so that multilingual scholarship, reciprocal translation, and locally grounded, community-based, and Indigenous knowledge can carry formal institutional authority.	Accreditation and ranking processes recognise multilingual and community-engaged scholarship; representatives from historically marginalised communities participate in curriculum and governance decisions; and promotion and funding systems reward sustained contributions to local, cooperative, and socially accountable economic practices.

Conclusions

Decolonising management education requires fundamentally interrogating the colonial and neoliberal structures that shape its content, pedagogy, and institutional priorities. While surface-level interventions, including non-Western theories and case studies, mark an essential step towards epistemic diversity, they remain insufficient in dismantling coloniality’s deeper ideological and structural legacies. Substantive decolonial transformation would require systemic change, including the restructuring of accreditation systems, faculty recruitment practices, and evaluation metrics that currently reinforce Western hegemony in management education.

Our multilevel analysis underscores that the dominance of neoliberalism in business education perpetuates colonial patterns of dispossession, erasure, and market-driven individualism, reinforcing a narrow economic rationality prioritising profit over equity and sustainability. In contrast, decolonial approaches envision management schools as spaces for pluriversal knowledge, where Indigenous, feminist, and relational ontologies challenge extractivist and hierarchical management models. By shifting the focus from market efficiency to social responsibility and ecological justice, management education can move towards a more inclusive and transformative agenda.

To pursue decolonial transformation, management schools need to diversify their curricula and reconsider the purposes and institutional conditions of management education beyond the reproduction of corporate elites. This requires embracing epistemic disobedience, resisting the universalisation of Western managerial thought, and amplifying the voices of scholars and practitioners from the Global South. In doing so, we can move beyond critique and towards co-creating knowledge systems that are genuinely global, equitable, and attuned to our time's urgent social and ecological crises.

Disclosure statement

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