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## Management in Critical Perspective

In all societies, people are involved in the complex process of organizing their everyday lives. Sometimes our routines run smoothly and we can forget how intricate they are, and how we are continually engaged, in ‘managing’ their operation. When our routines are disrupted – by others’ unpredictability, our indiscretions or ill-health, for example – we are reminded of the fragility of what we take for granted. Each one of us engages in a daily struggle to accomplish ordinary tasks, maintain normal routines and deal with the unexpected. In the context of modern societies, however, responsibility for many organizing activities has been delegated to, or appropriated by, experts. Amongst them are managers hired to shape and regulate so many aspects of our lives – as employees but also in other spheres, such as areas of leisure and the provision of personal services (Hancock and Tyler, 2009).

Forms of corporate and public management exert a pervasive influence over diverse aspects of modern life that previously were organized within communities and by households. Education, health, consumption and the arts as well as work have become objects of management knowledge and control. The application of ostensibly rational, impartial forms of calculation and control, including control exercised by managers, is pervasive (Grey, 1999). In sum, experts in managing have assumed the role of ‘improvers’ of established ways of doing things and ways of life.

At the same time, modern societies have become increasingly risk and crisis-prone – to, for example, financial meltdown, terrorist threats, nuclear annihilation, ecological degradation, global warming. In addition, there are many less dramatic but nevertheless problematic aspects of modern society, including a widely felt loss of a sense of meaning and purpose in working life (Sennett, 1998, 2006). In affluent or even ‘post-affluent’ societies, there is a slavish preoccupation with materialism and the acquisition of property – something that is manifest in the emphasis placed upon the production, and especially the marketing, of goods and services. Often, consumption has more to do with boosting status and self-esteem – by keeping up, or ahead of, one’s immediate or global neighbours – than with human well-being or flourishing. Economic activity and need satisfaction exist in what has become an increasingly ambiguous, if not perverse, relationship. In contemporary capitalism, greed, superficiality and hedonism dominate; and in these circumstances many people find it difficult to develop a sense of well-being or fulfilment. We are



bombarded by images and messages which declare that our lives will be bettered (only) by acquiring more things, finer titles, more impressive careers. We then find ourselves caught up in a 'rat race' where insecurity, anxiety and suffering are temporarily suspended but unaddressed and so effectively reinforced (Alvesson, 2012b). Since management is deeply complicit in the organization and development of modern societies, making sense of management, as a key locus of expert control, is critical. It is critical not only for our self-understanding but, more grandiosely, for the future of modern societies and their sustainability.



### **Seductions of Capitalism and the Limits of 'Progress'**

When contemplating the achievements of the modern era, it is reassuring to believe that advances in science, and the expertise attributed to its enlightening powers, has swept away much dogma and prejudice. In the Western world dogmas of religion and superstition have indeed been widely challenged and debunked, at least by the more educated of their populations. But they have been superseded by modern, secular myths – such as the belief that science and related forms of knowledge guarantees progress, that markets ensure freedom and efficiency, that affluent consumption is the route to happiness, and that experts know best. In this process, values and practices other than those that contribute directly to economic growth and consumption, and so increase private wealth, have become marginalized and neutralized. Nonetheless, and mainly at the fringes of society, there have been repeated eruptions of disenchantment and recurrent efforts to fashion new values and practices which, as the pressures placed upon resources by globalizing capitalism increase, are set to intensify.

The modern world is shaped by varieties of capitalism in which scientific and technical knowledge has been applied to extract profits from the production and marketing of every conceivable product and service. As a distinctive politico-economic system in which wage labour is hired to make commodities that can be sold for a profit, the reach of capitalism has extended around the globe to incorporate former state socialist societies (e.g. the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China). Capitalism has gained legitimacy by absorbing and then promoting pressures to support the public supply, and subsequent privatization (Grimshaw, Vincent and Willmott, 2001), of a basic level of public goods, in the form of housing, health care and education. The provision of these goods has facilitated an important measure of political stability and, with it, mass consumption as an engine of economic growth. Conversely, any withdrawal of these goods, or slowing of economic growth, threatens this legitimacy.

With technological progress and wealth creation has come a creeping commercialization and commodification of everyday life. Most recently, its advance has developed the 'new' markets of entertainment, leisure and, increasingly, the premium pricing of ecological correctness (e.g. organic and other green or low carbon produce). As the meaning of life has been progressively identified with the pleasures of consuming commodities produced and delivered by capitalist corporations, the governance of modern economic and political institutions has become geared to



capitalist expansion. Politics has become preoccupied with the technical task of preserving the status quo as democratic debate about ends is displaced by a technocratic focus upon the refinement of means.

Consider the issue of how 'consumer needs' are defined. Marketing techniques play a central role in the formation of these 'needs' – for example, by associating products with enviable lifestyles or cultural heroes. Leading marketing textbooks are largely silent on the issue of how consumer demand is constituted – how anxieties are generated and then exploited or aspirations are fuelled and responded to. There is scant discussion of the relationship between increased consumption and ecological destruction. In the world of marketing, as in other management specialisms, 'the environment' is referred to as if it were something 'out there' rather than an integral part of our lives (Naess and Rothenberg, 1991): it becomes yet another sphere or object of management knowledge and control – equivalent to the markets for entertainment, health and leisure – ripe for penetration and colonization. Growing environmental anxiety among consumers is not addressed directly but, rather, is seized upon as an opportunity for product differentiation and gaining a competitive advantage (e.g. through the so-called greening of products or the building of 'environmentally friendly' or 'sociably responsible' corporate images). From a critical perspective the discourses and practices of marketing, for example, are seen to be propagators and seducers of consumer desire as much as they are articulations of, or responses to, human need (Klein, 2000; Morgan, 2003).

As a counter-image to a dominant view of economic actors being engaged in value creation, one could suggest that many businesses are involved in forms of *value destruction*: cities and landscapes are transformed in environmentally and aesthetically negative ways for commercial purposes; as new images and accompanying aspirations are developed, existing products become out-dated and lose their attractiveness; people are led to believe that what is not novel or fashionable is inferior. It is seldom wanton destruction or even built-in obsolescence. But often the balance between creation and destruction is not self-evident, as attention is given only to the immediate positive aspects of innovation with minimal consideration being given to adverse unintended or long-term consequences. Consider, for example, the notion of 'financial innovation', in the form of securitization, that was at the heart of the financial meltdown of 2008 (Willmott, 2010; 2011a). As Engelen et al. (2011) note, 'the coupling of financialization and innovation established a normative bias in its favour with the growth of securitization interpreted as engineering which facilitated the efficient marketization of risk.' What it promised was the spread of risk; but what it delivered was its mystification and, paradoxically, its concentration resulting in the drying up of credit and the use of public funds to preserve banks that had evaded the discipline of 'moral hazard' by becoming 'too big to fail'.

The strength of attachment to capitalist values (e.g. individualism expressed in the form of maximization of self-interest, as exemplified by the financial sector) and priorities (e.g. private accumulation and mass consumption) means that responsibility for social division (e.g. foreclosures, unemployment) and ecological destruction (e.g. Deepwater Horizon 'accident') is more likely to be attributed to industrialization,

science, weak regulation, irresponsible companies or some combination of such factors. By focusing upon such elements, there is a tendency to disregard their shared development within a politico-economic system founded upon domination and exploitation where costs are routinely 'externalized' or treated as 'acceptable business risks' to be covered by insurance. Exploitation is systematically built into capitalism. The creative capacity of human beings, hired as employees, is harnessed to produce wealth that is appropriated privately by the owners of capital, which takes the form of factories, service firms, intellectual property (e.g. patents), etc. Domination is an integral feature of capitalism in the form of institutions (e.g. education) and ideologies (e.g. liberalism) that naturalize its features and/or represent them as congruent with 'human nature' or most consistent with the preservation of 'freedom', 'equality', 'democracy', and so on. In such ways, divisiveness and destructiveness are downplayed as capitalism is commended as the means of overcoming such problems.<sup>1</sup>

Despite their eager professing of green credentials, politicians and industrialists struggle to provide leadership as they remain preoccupied with 'managing' the survival and growth of their (capitalist) economies and businesses. Their priorities have been dramatically demonstrated during the 'Euro Crisis' of 2011 which is unfolding as we complete this book. Remarkably, the problems (e.g. of Greece and Italy) have been widely diagnosed in terms of national profligacy and 'sovereign debt', and the 'bailing out' of these nations. Yet, arguably, it is the banks that have been content to lend to these nations that are, once again, being 'bailed out' by ordinary taxpayers – of Germany or through the European Central Bank. We, it seems, have become the captives of (financialized) capitalism, unwilling or unable to debate and renew the meaning of modern ideas of freedom, community and democracy, and reluctant to face up to the question of how an espoused commitment to these ideas can be translated into substantive action and appropriate forms of governance and planetary husbandry. Of course, politicians and companies are also to a degree captives of voters and lobbyists. They are pressured by demands for a continuing flow of inexpensive and accessible goods and services, and resist making the material sacrifices necessary to reduce gross inequalities and secure sustainability. Such demands are fuelled by huge investments of firms in promoting the appetite for material goods, and the promises of politicians to maintain economic growth and thereby 'improve' the material standard of living.

Failure or refusal to recognize the interconnectedness of social and ecological problems spawns remedial action that is limited to interventions where quick wins can be made. The excesses and gross inequalities of capitalist development, nationally and globally, go largely unchallenged, and, at best, state provision addresses only the most shocking, de-legitimizing manifestations of destructiveness, deprivation and neglect. Billions have been found almost instantly to bail out the banks but, in the years following the financial crisis, many countries are experiencing great difficulties in sustaining core welfare programmes. These have been assessed to be too expensive and/or the services have been contracted to the private sector where labour conditions are generally inferior with regards to employment security, trade union representation, pensions, etc., and so costs are lower. While bankers continued to pay

themselves billions of dollars in bonuses, the withdrawal of the services and benefits (in order to reduce the deficit produced by the financial crisis and its impact upon growth) has been justified on the grounds that such benefits breed a culture of fecklessness and dependency. Experts operating in the financial markets completely failed to make prudent assessments of the risks inherent in the use sophisticated financial instruments (e.g. CDOs, CDSs). Yet, following the crisis, it is the experts in financial markets to whom states are beholden, since a collapse of their currency and/or a crippling rise in interest charges on loans to service the debts in part incurred in bailing out the banks is threatened if they continue to borrow for social purposes (Tett, 2010).

### **What Then of the Managers?**

Managers form a heterogeneous group whose members work across a variety of sectors – e.g. public, private, voluntary – and in diverse organizations where they undertake a wide variety of tasks. They occupy different specialisms (e.g. marketing) and work at different levels in organizational hierarchies. They manage in uncertain conditions and are in possession of imperfect information; and they are under pressure to be responsive to a plurality of demands. This diversity and dynamism makes it far from easy to generalize about what management is and what managers do. Our ambition is to cover management and managerial work fairly broadly, but we concentrate primarily on management of business (and so have comparatively little to say about public sector and third sector forms of management) because it is ‘business’ rather than public management or social enterprise that most strongly shapes and influences the theory and practice of management. Our focus is also limited principally to managers with significant influence, i.e. above the level of supervisory or junior levels of management.

We justify this selectivity on the grounds that, in our assessment, practices of corporate management developed in the private sector have conditioned its application across other sectors. The form of management developed within larger capitalist enterprises has been taken up in other contexts as a model to be emulated, albeit in modified form. Whilst its relevance and appropriateness for other, not-for-profit contexts is very debatable, its ‘market-orientated’ logic, in particular, has been widely diffused – most notably, in the development of ‘new public management’ which is distinguished by the incorporation of private sector disciplines and performance measures.

Amid confusions and uncertainties about managers, and their collective activity as ‘management’, there is a tendency to privilege one single, *technical* meaning: management as a universal process comprising a number of functions, such as planning, coordinating, and so on. Ignored in this conception is the embeddedness of the managers performing these functions, individually and collectively, within relations of power and domination. These *social* relations are crucial as it is through them that the functions ascribed to management are defined, allocated and undertaken. Management is inescapably a *social practice* (Reed, 1984) as it is embedded in social

values, politics, interests and relations of class, gender, ethnicity, etc. As such, the meaning and activity of management are most 'intimately bound up with the social situation of the managing group' (Child, 1969: 16). The nature and significance of management depend upon the historical and societal context(s) in which it emerges and takes shape (Wilson and Thomson, 2006). The decision making of (senior) managers increasingly shapes these contexts (Scarborough, 1998).

The 'social situation' in which modern management has developed is one of specifically capitalist economic relations and the rise of the modern state within diverse societal contexts. This is important because, when the historical and cultural embeddedness of management is appreciated, it is no longer plausibly represented as a set of universal functions. Instead, it is more compellingly understood as 'an outgrowth of disparities in socio-economic power, the acquisition or initiation of work processes by private capital or the state, and the desire for control which flows from that' (Hales, 1993: 6). Management is conditioned by the specific, local contexts in which it develops and which it shapes. It comprises diverse practices that develop within institutions established by private capital and the modern state and which are conditioned by disparities of socio-economic power. In these institutions, managers are delegated responsibility to exercise discretion in a manner that secures the control and reproduction of established, yet inherently fragile, relations of power. Their work involves reforming these institutions in order to sustain them. To this end, managers develop and apply whatever technologies – coercive and seductive – that are believed to be effective and legitimate. Yet, while managers are empowered *inter alia* to raise funds, generate revenues and allocate resources, the nature and extent of the rise and influence of management – what Burnham (1941) called the 'managerial revolution' – is restricted as well as enabled by wider relations, of patriarchy and ethnicity as well as capital and the state within which management decision making is embedded.

This assessment begs the question of why, in textbooks, management is so widely presented as a universal and neutral activity. One answer, as we suggested earlier, is that the authority of management depends, at least in the business sector, upon a covering over of the exclusion of democratic control over decision making – including the raising of funds, the generation of revenues, and the allocation of resources, within work organizations (Deetz, 1992a). This is no coincidence as disparities of ownership, income and opportunity have been secured by delegating control to management whose task it is, in the private sector at least, to deliver profitable growth by ensuring productive effort and containing dissent. The institution of management has ensured that privately owned work organizations are largely exempted from any form of democratic accountability to employees or a wider citizenship (Khuruna, 2002). Top management alone, enabled as well as constrained by corporate governance regulation, is expected to exercise control over organizational matters, although there are many formal and informal expressions and modifications of this prerogative. Notably, there are some differences between countries as a consequence of legislation that incorporates some representation of labour and sources of countervailing power from unions, professional employees, pressure groups and so on.

Managers are intermediaries between those who hire them and those whom they manage. Managers are employed to coordinate, motivate, appease and control the productive efforts of others. These 'others' do not necessarily share managerial agendas and might otherwise be inclined to be productive in ways that would not accommodate the 'overhead' of managerial salaries and the dividends and capital growth that accrue to shareholders. As management becomes a separate activity undertaken by a specific, comparatively privileged group, any notion of work organization comprising a community of interest with shared goals invites a sceptical assessment. A 'them' and 'us' division is invited and can easily widen; and one key task of management is to address and minimize such a possibility. The situation is complicated, however, as managers are themselves salaried employees with their own sectional (e.g. empire building and defending) agendas, even if they are more directly accountable than other employees to major shareholders or, in the case of public management, to political elites and ultimately to electorates. Almost all managers are subordinates, and most are perhaps more subordinates than superordinates (although, as we have noted, our focus is primarily upon middle and senior rather than junior managers).

The critical study of management unsettles conventional wisdoms about its sovereignty as well as its universality and the impartiality of its professed expertise. It is therefore worth stressing that the critical study of management is by no means 'anti-management'. The purpose of 'critical management studies' (CMS), as we conceive of it, is not to commend, or participate in, the Utopian project of eliminating all forms of hierarchy, removing specialist divisions of labour or even abolishing the separation of management from other forms of work.<sup>2</sup> Rather, in addition to challenging received wisdoms about management, such as its impartial professionalism and political neutrality, the critical study of management aspires to foster less socially oppressive forms of organizing and managing. The (for us) desired democratization of managerial activity may result in divisive work organizations being replaced by collectives or cooperatives in which there is a focus *inter alia* upon social objectives, green forms of work and a reduced vertical division of labour. It is also highly likely that some vertical as well as horizontal divisions will be retained, albeit ones that are accountable to diverse stakeholders rather than shareholders or fund managers interested primarily or exclusively in securing or enhancing the return to investors. It is envisaged that social divisions will be justified through processes of democratic contestation, and not by executive elites whose decision making is supported by spurious, self-serving assertions about the rationality, impartiality or effectiveness of their rule. The demand here is not for an end to management but for the harnessing and redirection of management to more democratically determined and accountable ends.

### **Beyond the Understanding of Management as a Technical Activity**

Recognizing the political context and social organization of management leads to the understanding that problems of management cannot be adequately addressed

purely by developing more efficient and effective forms of technical control. Whenever this is assumed, problems (e.g. gross inequalities, ecological destruction, diminishing planetary resources) that are fundamentally social and political in organization come to be interpreted as amenable to solutions using purely instrumental forms of reasoning.

Blindness to the social conditions and media of management restricts awareness of how the human difficulties and challenges associated with organizing everyday tasks are compounded by major social divisions – manifest in differences of values, objectives and resources, and clashes of interests.

### Exhibit 1 An Etymology of Management

The origins of the term 'management' can be traced to the Italian word *maneggiare*, which means 'to handle a horse'. This semantic root is instructive in its portrayal of the social divisiveness of management as a contradictory process: a process in which a person simultaneously takes responsibility for and seeks to control a valuable, yet recalcitrant, resource. Given the importance of securing cooperation from wilful, potentially resistant 'human resources' it might be assumed that managers would wish to gain total control of employees. However, total pacification is unlikely to be secured in the absence of the kinds of regime envisaged by Huxley in *Brave New World* (and even there, it was not fully effective). In any event, it is doubtful whether total subjugation would be unequivocally advantageous.

The limits of total conformity are dramatically exposed when use is made of the stratagem of 'work to rule' – that is, doing precisely what is required without exercising any discretion (or extending any goodwill). Working to rule demonstrates the dependence of managers upon the judgment and goodwill of employees as it simultaneously mocks and subverts the exercise of management control. On the other hand, allowing employees a measure of autonomy, however carefully controlled (e.g. through the strengthening of corporate cultures), exposes managers to the risk that employees will 'abuse' or redefine this autonomy for their own purposes. Managers want employees to develop and deploy initiative. But managers also want employee initiative and discretion to be exercised in managerially acceptable and disciplined ways. For this reason, managers seek to manage the meaning of work and employment. It has been observed that:

a crucial variable in the construction of reality lies in the *management of meaning*: actors compete to contrive and propagate interpretations of social behaviour and relationships . . . The management of meaning is an expression of power, and the meanings so managed are a crucial aspect of political relations. (Cohen and Camaroff, 1976: 102, cited in Gowler and Legge, 1983: 198, emphasis in original)

Given the challenges encountered by managers in organizing people, it is not difficult to understand why the metaphor of horse handling was adopted. It lucidly

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articulates the demanding task of marshalling and channelling the energies, habits and desires of potentially stubborn, unruly and headstrong suppliers of labour who are capable of developing competing definitions of the situation, including an unflattering assessment of their bosses.

The *maneggiare* metaphor also conveys the understanding that managers form an elite group or stratum that is different from, and superior to, those they 'handle'. The metaphor does not endorse the idea of management as just one, technical element in a specialized division of labour. Rather, it highlights the *social division* of the 'handlers' (from the 'horses' who supply the labour) and the managerial skills applied to them: labour is 'broken in' – by teachers in schools and colleges if not by managers in factories and offices – and continuously monitored and developed in order for its profitably productive potential to be realized.

Managers are of course well aware of many of the conflicts, pressures, uncertainties and even the contradictions that beset their work (Clarke et al., 2009; Jackall, 1988). They may frequently feel frustrated and oppressed by systems that they supposedly at least partly control; and they may bemoan the difficulties encountered in gaining cooperation and commitment from their managerial colleagues as well as from their subordinates (Watson, 1994). Such difficulties and dilemmas are not well addressed by received managerial wisdom. This wisdom ignores or denies the social formation and power-invested purposes of managerial work, as it conceives of management and managing as universal functions accomplished by applying a 'best practice' set of tools, techniques and systems. The most pressing challenges are addressed by resort to managerial mantras of 'organizational restructuring', 'improved communications' or more 'effective leadership' in the hope that these will provide relevant remedies for more deep-seated problems of social division, normalized domination, routinized exploitation and ecological destruction.

The education of managers routinely excludes or marginalizes ideas that are, potentially, most relevant for diagnosing and addressing the pressures and contradictions of managerial work (Ghoshal, 2005; Khuruna, 2007). Management education and training continues to encourage managers to understand themselves as depositories of impartial expertise who privilege the claims of technical, instrumental reason. When the limits of a technical understanding of management are acknowledged, managers are seen to juggle competing demands for resources and recognition – demands that come from more senior managers as much as from their subordinates. That said, a narrow focus upon intergroup politics can deflect attention from an appreciation of how managerial work is deeply embedded in wider social divisions (Willmott, 1987; 1997a). As we noted earlier, managers act to intermediate between those who deploy resources to dominate or exploit others, and others who are subordinated in such processes. We now outline briefly the main theoretical inspiration for this way of making sense of management.



## Critical Theory and Modern Society

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Since time immemorial, and certainly since the Enlightenment, human beings have exercised powers of critical reasoning to doubt and change established customs, ideologies and institutions. In the modern age, practices of witchcraft and slavery, and, more recently, patriarchal practices, have been subjected to critical scrutiny. Varieties of critical thinking, including Critical Theory (CT), build upon this legacy. The intent is to promote reflection upon oppressive and exclusionary practices, and thereby to facilitate the extension of greater autonomy and responsibility. By autonomy is meant the capability of human beings to make informed judgments about values, ideals and paths that are comparatively unimpeded by dependencies and/or compromised by a subordination to inequalities of wealth, power and status. We are not here invoking a fantasy of full sovereignty conceived of the individual human being who exists in splendid social isolation. To the contrary, we assume that as humans we are always formed by social relations, cultural understandings and unconscious processes that often impede or conflict with our capacity to be reflective, to use our knowledge, to exercise our intellectual skills and to engender a sense of morality. Nonetheless, in contemporary society, such capacities remain significant; and their development can be facilitated through education and research. By responsibility we mean a developed awareness of our social interconnectedness and, thus, a realization of how our collective responsibilities extend to our husbandry of the planet. In the light of its commitment to the expansion of autonomy and responsibility, critical thinking doubts the rationality and necessity of forms of acquisitiveness, divisiveness and destructiveness that accompany globalizing capitalism. These characteristics are manifest where nation states compete with each other to produce the most favourable conditions for investment, and where corporate executives are incentivized and disciplined by shareholders to pursue every avenue for maximizing profitability. Since management theory and practice are implicated in these developments, they are highly appropriate targets of critical analysis.



## The Capacity for Critical Reflection

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The intent of critical thinking, and of CT more specifically, is to challenge oppressive institutions and practices where there is little or no meaningful democratic accountability and/or where there are significant harmful consequences. An example of such a challenge is the influence of feminism and the women's movement in disrupting a range of (chauvinistic) values and practices and so combating their normalization. A related ideal is for the development of social relations, including employment relations, in which oppressive pressures to acquire and display gendered identities, including the expectation to act and feel as a 'real' man or embrace 'true' female values, are dissolved. To be clear, this emancipatory move does not advocate a narrowing of gender differences, where men and women become culturally indistinguishable. Rather, it calls for the removal of oppressive gender relations in which

there is pressure to conform to gender stereotypes or ideals promoted through the media for purposes of consumption and/or control. This could lead to much less predetermined and varied ways of 'doing' or 'non-doing' gender than established practice routinely permits.

The resistance to such emancipatory movements is not difficult to recognize. Despite the considerable strides made by feminism, its radical values and practices are marginalized in most countries, and diluted if not excluded in most organizations. Even the basic principle of equal pay for equal work has yet to be established in all workplaces. Women remain woefully underrepresented in processes of managerial knowledge development and dissemination. In recent years, a conservative ideology of individualism (see below) has tended to blunt the radical edge of feminism as neo-liberalism has elevated the individual above more collective and progressive considerations. Gender issues have tended to become reduced to issues about promoting women's careers, thereby further reinforcing a strong focus on careerism, and so displacing other values – for men as well as women – in life, including meaningful, comparatively stress-free forms of employment. In short, this brief reflection upon the influence of feminism, and its colonization by conservative ideologies, provides a cautionary illustration of how critical ideas can become domesticated and instrumentalized for other purposes. There is no reason to believe that insights and demands associated with critical management studies are not subject to the same influences, and thus face the prospect of selective recuperation through mainstream theory and practice (see Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007; Willmott, 2012).

The ideology of individualism encourages us to assume that we are each sovereign, self-determining beings, and that our life chances – including access to education, health services and so on – are attributable to our individual talents, application or good fortune. 'Success' in gaining grades at school, 'winning' jobs in the labour market or even 'acquiring' sexual partners is attributed to some winning trait that the individual is deemed to possess, and not to their circumstances. Without denying that human beings differ, the development and elevation of specific attributes is a product of history and culture, and is not solely or even mainly the sovereign work of individuals.

Critical reflection casts doubt on the dominant, received wisdom of modern, capitalist societies in which individualism, fuelled by narcissism, is pervasive (and perhaps most apparent in the cult of celebrity that applies no less to CEOs of large, publicly recognized firms than to the transient 'stars' of reality TV shows). In this regard, a condition and a consequence of autonomy and responsibility, as contrasted to individualism and fame, is the flourishing of democracy – which is not the same as a society that boasts nominally democratic political institutions. Nominal democracy can easily degenerate into largely formal and stage-managed processes where parties converge on the 'middle ground', and participation in democratic institutions drains away as it seems to make little difference which party or politician is elected. The risk is that dogmatism ('there is no alternative' to the middle ground) displaces debate and critique. The measure of a democratic society is not reducible to the existence of particular, formal institutions but is reliant upon the strength of its

members' everyday commitments to, and the upholding of, democratic values in all institutions, including its workplaces. As Deetz (1992a: 350–1) has observed of workplace democracy:

it is a moral political issue, not one of greater productivity and satisfaction ... We know something of civic responsibilities, and we need to take them to work ... The moral foundation for democracy is in the daily practices of communication ... The recovery of democracy must start in these practices.

Fully democratic decision making occurs when individuals are able to think and act autonomously and responsibly, as discussed earlier, in ways that acknowledge and support their interconnectedness, rather than striving to control and exploit interdependence for sectional or self-aggrandizing purposes.

These are laudable aims. Not surprisingly, some critical thinking is sceptical of the possibilities for democracy and emancipation – on the grounds, for example, that it is not possible to adjudicate rationally between the truth claims of competing ideologies. We will return to this issue in Chapters 2 and 7. For the moment, we note that forms of critical thinking, including Critical Theory, observe that emancipatory progress has been made in the past – with regard to slavery, for example – and, potentially, can be made in the future. Contemporary struggles to overthrow despots and thereby develop more democratic forms of government provide other examples – even though such advances may be compromised, precarious and subject to reversal. Or to offer another, widely recognized example, there has been significant progress regarding gender issues in many countries over recent decades. Today, there is less inclination to regard nature as an unproblematic resource that can be exploited without regard to the consequences. As in the other cases, there are no guarantees of a progressive outcome for emancipatory campaigning, and critical reflection is a necessary but insufficient condition of such change. It is a necessary element as it challenges established ideas and practices in which diverse, institutionalized forms of oppression are harboured and normalized. But emancipation requires the embodiment of critical thought in practice. To the extent that this step is ignored or marginalized, critique contains traces of what it seeks to challenge and eliminate.

### ***Reconstruction and Critique***

In Critical Theory (CT) a distinction is made between abstract and concrete 'moments' of reflection. The abstract moment of reconstruction mobilizes critical reason to diagnose prevailing conditions. For example, reconstruction identifies and analyses the presence of elements of patriarchal thinking within the ostensibly impartial and functional disciplines and neutral techniques of management (Collinson and Hearn, 1996). When re-constructing such received wisdoms, the analyst acts comparatively cerebrally and dispassionately as an observer (whilst in principle acknowledging the limitations of such efforts). When engaging in critique, in contrast, responsibility is taken for tackling the problems in a way that involves a

commitment to participating in changing the 'objects' of (reconstructive) analysis (e.g. in respect of one's everyday practices, by campaigning for their transformation, etc.). Critique involves a move beyond reconstruction to incorporate critical self-reflection articulated as praxis. Critique fuses reflection with transformative practice that must be actively struggled for.

When employed in an organization or indeed when studying at university, it is not unusual to experience some twinges of discomfort about aspects of 'management' that are disquieting or mildly offensive. Particular actions or demands may violate a sense of propriety, fairness or reasonable conduct – for example, behaviour that is considered to be excessively punitive or divisive. Consider the example of a group of senior managers studied by Watson (1994). Following interviews with their new managing director, Paul Syston, who was suspected of being hired as an axeman to 'rightsize' the organization, each of the managers feared for their own job<sup>3</sup>. Such unnerving occasions may potentially stimulate reflection on the structures (e.g. of ownership and control) that make such episodes possible and render those subjected to them mute and/or deferential. If reflection is to move in the direction of critical reflection, however, there must be some theory, whether simple or sophisticated, that can provide a way of reconstructing such experiences of managerial work.

In the light of our earlier reference to the ideology of individualism, it is understandable that the managers studied by Watson were preoccupied with Syston's motives, his personal style and his inclinations. They did not engage in reconstructive reflection upon the conditions – notably, the control exercised by dominant shareholders – that make it both possible and legitimate for bosses like Syston to treat fellow managers as expendable human resources, and to interact with them in a correspondingly distant, intimidating manner. Had the managers engaged in a process of reconstructive reflection, they might have understood their treatment by Syston to be symptomatic of their occupancy of a contradictory position within capitalist organizations – a position in which they are simultaneously made responsible for organizational performance, and yet are mere sellers of (comparatively well remunerated and prestigious) labour who fear being side-lined or losing their jobs.

Instead of personalizing the problem with Syston in terms of his style, or his appearance as 'a bit of a miserable sod' (ibid.: 103), these managers could have reflected on how the hierarchical relationship – and associated social distance – between managing directors (Syston) and senior managers operates as a potent mechanism of control. And beyond that, they might have reflected on how this parallels their own relationship to their subordinates, and the difficulties they encounter in being more 'personal' with their staff without being manipulative and/or hypocritical (Roberts, 1984). Arguably, it is the structural arrangement of subordination, and not only or even mainly Syston's personality *per se*, that inhibits senior managers in asking their boss directly about his plans or suggesting their own ideas – in other words, to initiate a form of praxis.

Turning to Syston, his status permitted him to assume an intimidating persona as a way of distancing and defending himself in relation to senior managers. The temptation for those who occupy elite positions is to develop a non-communicative,

intimidating or 'bullying' style. When looked at in this way, Syston's frosty impersonality is an understandable response to the pressures and associated anxieties that *he* experiences in a position of superordination. By refusing to enter into any kind of personal relationship with his senior managers, Syston excluded or denied any moral relationship to them, and was therefore more readily able to treat them not as human beings with families and so on, but as commodities to be bought (hired) and sold (fired) at will. In doing so, it could reasonably be argued that Syston was not being sadistic or bullying, but was actually being more direct and 'realistic' (and not paternalistic) about the nature of his relationship to the senior managers, even if this did little to endear them to him or elicit their support.

To move from reconstructive diagnosis to critique would require the senior managers to reflect critically upon their anxieties in response to Syston's silence about his plans for the company, and perhaps to recognize them as symptomatic of a hierarchical relationship acted out either aggressively or openly by Syston, depending on one's interpretation. In which case, the senior managers might have directly addressed their anxieties and collectively overcome them, at least to the point of engaging Syston in a discussion of 'his plans', rather than being intimidated into silence by his style.

This shift to critique is, however, difficult to imagine in the absence of any depth of solidarity amongst the senior managers and a collective preparedness to be assertive, rather than deferential, in relation to their boss. Acting as self-contained individuals, they were reluctant to admit and share their anxieties and vulnerability. Critical self-reflection was therefore inhibited, or at least individualized. In principle, a process of critique, as contrasted with cathartic personality bashing ('miserable sod') could have surfaced, reduced their anxiety, and so enabled the managers to confront their new boss instead of being intimidated by him. Instead of deciding to 'wait and see' or agreeing to work on the assumption that Syston was listening and willing to be persuaded (Watson, 1994: 104–5), their sessions with Syston could, in principle, have prompted a process of mutually supportive critique amongst the managers. More practically, the managers could have resolved to develop a more open and democratic form of corporate governance in which those occupying managerial positions (e.g. managing directors but also themselves) became more accountable to fellow employees – a shift that, logically, requires managers to seek out, challenge and change diverse autocratic, antidemocratic practices, including the way managers at all levels tend to relate to their subordinates. Such a shift, it is worth stressing, would foster not only procedural changes in corporate governance but also substantive, embodied changes in how managers make sense of their responsibilities and undertake their work. People who are inclined to 'wait and see' rather than to 'reflect and act' are viewed, in the light of critical analysis, as simultaneously the victims and the perpetrators of the situations from which, ostensibly, they desire to escape. This diagnosis flows from the embrace of a critical tradition of social scientific enquiry that strives to foster an emancipatory transformation of modern institutions through the development of reconstructive analysis but ultimately through engaged critique.

Of course, people in positions of dependency – like the subordinates of Syston – have learned to be deferential to their bosses and so are inclined to be cautious, and are generally eager to safeguard their positions. Apart from the issue of whether passivity is typically the best tactic here, the wisdom of striving to hold down or retain the job at all costs must be questioned. Many people understandably stick to their jobs mainly because they have become dependent upon a given level of pay and status, and so cling to their job regardless of the personal (e.g. stress) and social (e.g. relationship) costs, so long as alternatives on the labour market seem inferior. But pay and status are perhaps overvalued, as becomes clear when people feel released rather than destroyed by redundancy or early retirement. Without underestimating the material and symbolic benefits of work, and pressures to follow conventional working and career patterns, more holistic considerations may motivate people to give priority to other considerations, such as opportunities to be creative, to undertake more fulfilling (e.g. community building) activities and/or to have more positive work relationships.



### Critical Thinking and Management Practice

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We have noted how mainstream views of management represent it as a technology of goal achievement (Macintyre, 1981). In textbooks and in training courses, management disciplines and skills (e.g. those of selection and appraisal ascribed to Human Resource Management professionals, see Chapter 4) are presented as neutral techniques that guide and empower individual employees to work more effectively.

A major problem for making sense of management is this: ‘whether a given manager is effective or not is, on the dominant view, a different question from that of the morality of the ends which his [*sic*] effectiveness serves or fails to serve’ (MacIntyre, 1981: 71). The authority ascribed to managerial techniques and skills acts to exclude subordinates from the opportunity to participate fully in decisions that directly or indirectly affect their working lives. Often obscured by a technical preoccupation with designing and operating systems and procedures, however, are the lives, and life worlds, of employees. In these worlds, moral evaluations – about the trustworthiness of managers’ promises (e.g. those made by Syston to his senior managers, see above) – motivate and condition behaviour. In working life, moral judgments are repeatedly made about the acceptability or reasonableness of others’ behaviour, including their expectations and their judgments. Explicit and implicit references to moral notions of ‘fairness’ and ‘reasonableness’ are routinely invoked by both managers and managed in order to manage expectations and gain a workable measure of agreement. In practice, management unavoidably relies upon a moral (normative) base of understandings that is ignored or obfuscated when wrapped up in the rhetoric of technical rationality, yet is rarely if ever eliminated (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007).

Management practices assume, promote and reward certain values and behaviour as they frustrate and punish the pursuit of other, competing agendas. When, for example, managers assume the moral virtue<sup>4</sup> and/or effectiveness of particular motivational

techniques directed at improving individual performance (e.g. performance-related pay), competitive and egoistic forms of behaviour tend to be induced (Perrow, 1986), often with adverse, unanticipated consequences for morale and cooperation, especially when rewarded individuals (e.g. traders in financial markets) do not pay for the downside of their actions (e.g. major write-downs). Techniques that reward individualistic behaviour perversely fuel the desire for ever more potent ways of feeding the egoism that they breed; and, in this process, the application of those techniques tends to have effects which undermine any efficiency gains that they initially produce (Roberts, 1984). An emphasis upon such techniques also deflects attention from moral–practical concerns about how more rational forms of management and organization might be developed – for example, with respect to the collective nurturing, husbanding and allocation of scarce resources for the improvement of education, housing, health care, etc., as well as to a widening of access to materially and symbolically valued goods.

In critical management studies (CMS), ‘best management practice’ is not a matter of identifying the most technically rational means of achieving current ends (e.g. profitable growth). Rather, ‘best practice’ is evaluated in terms of its contribution to the realization of the progressive objectives of social justice, greater autonomy, responsibility, democracy and ecologically sustainable development. In countering apathy and fatalism, critical analysis envisions the possibility of extending emancipation from the overcoming of past domination and oppression (e.g. slavery, employment discrimination, etc.) to address institutionalized forms of oppression within workplaces where there is little or no democratic accountability for how resources are applied; how the divisions of labour are determined; and how tasks are designed, allocated and rewarded. When framed in this way, the responsibility of management is not equated with preserving or improving structures and processes for a better realization of a given, narrow set of objectives. Instead, this responsibility is conceived as a collective task, guided by processes of critical self-reflection concerned with the identification and realization of alternative values and practices that are humanly (and ecologically) more fulfilling and less degrading.

By championing ideas about ‘social justice’, ‘autonomy’, ‘responsibility’, ‘democracy’, ‘sustainability’ and ‘ecological balance’, critical thinking engages in an ongoing struggle with competing views that are hostile to its diagnoses and aspirations. By struggling to mobilize the emancipatory power of human reason, barriers to human cooperation and collective well-being can be brought to consciousness, debated and collectively lowered. Whether or not people, organizations and societies are responsive to the challenges of critical, emancipating thinking is partly a test of the persuasive eloquence of its advocates. The challenge of translating these aspirations into practice is to act in ways that disrupt and counter the dominance of means–ends rationality and the pervasiveness of conservative and reactionary thinking.

When set in this context, this book can be interpreted as an expression of hope: it assumes that more thoughtful organizational practice is possible by pursuing progressive ends and adopting means consistent with their realization. With this aim in mind, diverse traditions of critical thought – including the ideas of Foucault, feminists, labour process analysts and poststructuralists – are welcomed in the process



of reflecting upon and fermenting progressive forms of change in contemporary management theory and practice (e.g. O'Doherty and Willmott, 2001; 2009). We do not believe that any particular tradition, such as Critical Theory, has all the answers. Nor would we claim that it can provide more than a partial, supplementary view on issues of management and organization which also involve ongoing efforts to generate positive means–ends relationships and improve technical rationality. The lack of a blueprint for a good 'ratio' between technical and emancipatory concerns and progressive change is perhaps frustrating or disappointing. However, it is consistent with an emphasis upon the self-determination of ends through critical self-reflection, rather than reliance upon an 'authority' – in the form of a technocrat or a charismatic leader – to identify and arrange their delivery.



### **The Challenge of Change and the Vision of Democracy**

The destruction of ecosystems by the dynamism and instability of capitalism stimulates critical reflection and radical action. The globalization of communications has been instrumental in heightening and spreading awareness of the increasing division between the global North and South and the related deterioration of the ecological system. More generally, in the most technologically advanced of modern societies there is a growing 'recognition that science and technology are double-edged: they create new parameters of risk and danger as well as offering beneficent possibilities for humankind' (Giddens, 1991: 28). There is a gathering sense of unease about the avowed rationality of scientific and technical fixes to human problems, including the sophisticated financial engineering at the centre of the global economic crisis of 2008 and, as we noted in the Introduction, the deep drilling for oil resulting in the loss of 11 human lives and ecological disaster visited upon the marine population and communities in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 (see also Exhibit 2). Economic growth and consumerism trigger not just enthusiasm but also suspicion and opposition. With a measure of scepticism and disillusionment, there has emerged a greater openness to other, diverse sources of authority, including the alternative perspectives fostered or supported by critical social theory and movements for sustainability and global justice.

#### **Exhibit 2 Failure of Management Blamed for BP Gulf of Mexico Blow-Out**

A US presidential commission blamed industry failures for last April's rig explosion which killed 11 people and caused one of the worst oil spills in history – also warning they were likely to recur without major reform. BP, Halliburton and Transocean, the three key companies involved with the Macondo well, made

*(Continued)*

*(Continued)*

individual decisions that increased risks of a blow-out, but saved significant time or money, the report said. 'Most of the mistakes and oversights at Macondo can be traced back to a single overarching failure – a failure of management,' it concluded. 'Better management by BP, Halliburton and Transocean would almost certainly have prevented the blow-out.'

Source: <http://www.oilspillcommission.gov/chief-counsels-report>

It is when the experience of daily living is felt to contradict business practices and values, such as cost cutting which compromises safety, that efforts to question inequalities, injustices and irrationalities are stimulated. Values (e.g. of fairness, meaningful work, community) nurtured in civil society are mobilized to problematize and transform aspects of a system (e.g. exploitation, domination, careerism) that frustrate the realization of those values. Individuals then become collectively mobilized and engaged in struggles to exert control over their future. The principal media of those struggles are social movements:

Social movements ... are the principal agents in the contemporary struggle for participatory democracy. The emergence of these movements – ecological or 'Green' movements, feminist movements, progressive trade union movements, neighbourhood control movements, consumer cooperatives and worker ownership movements, and so on – represent an uncompromising call in contemporary society for democratic participation and self-management. As alternative movements, they have identified the technocratic system and its apolitical decision-making strategies as primary targets of their countercultural opposition. (Fischer, 1990: 355–6)

For example, following the pollution of the area produced by the blow-out of the BP rig in 2010, Greenpeace activists mounted a protest by scaling another deepwater oil rig, 'Centenario', located in the Gulf of Mexico. They gained media coverage by deploying banners that read 'Stop Deepwater Oil Drilling' and 'Go Beyond Oil'.<sup>5</sup> Despite the difficulties and obstacles encountered in fostering emancipatory change, social movements demonstrate possibilities for promoting moral and political renewal. In these processes, managers can also play a part by supporting all forms of progressive development, in either a professional or personal capacity. It is far too simplistic or convenient to exclude them on the grounds that they are the architects of oppressive, undemocratic practices and/or that they are responsible only to corporate and shareholder priorities. The position and subjectivity of many managers is much more complex, contradictory and open than is suggested by one-dimensional conceptions of their work and allegiances. This is not to deny, as we noted earlier, that managers in the private sector are hired to organize work processes in ways that realize a profit for shareholders or that in

the public sector managers are comparatively constrained by budgets and targets. But, as comparatively privileged employees, they nonetheless experience the stress and oppression associated with the controls to which *they* are subjected (e.g. budgets, appraisals, targets, etc.), even if this means that their resistance to socially divisive and ecologically destructive practices, especially in the workplace, is likely to be weaker and (even) more covert.

What managers often lack – and do not find in conventional management textbooks – is a way of making much sense of uncomfortable and/or contradictory experiences – such as the treatment of senior managers by Paul Syston commented upon above. Their limited capacity to make sense of management as a social practice can result in managers becoming hardened, finding rationalizations for their actions or becoming bewildered in the face of employee reactions to their interventions. Consider the example of a plant manager at a major chemicals company described by Nichols and Beynon (1977: 40–3). After reading a leaflet in which managers were called ‘pigs’, a manager is reported to have said to a fellow colleague: “*Us* they mean ... It’s us they’re talking about. I’m no pig. I bloody well *care* about what I’m doing”.

What the manager found hard to bear was being required, as a consequence of a decision made in Head Office, to make a number of workers redundant. He found this difficult – not only because he knew ‘that redundancy can be “fucking awful”’ (ibid.: 43), but because it led, or forced, him to think of employees as numbers who had to be cajoled or subtly pressured to leave voluntarily. “You see you find yourself counting: That’s fourteen gone. That’ll give a bit of space in the system. One of them’s changed his mind – the bastard! I don’t think I’m like *that* – but you certainly find yourself doing it” (ibid.).

This manager experienced his work, or at least this aspect of it, as ‘a moral problem’ although he also found himself translating it into a technical one of fulfilling the quota of volunteers for redundancy. He was confused about the extent of personal responsibility that he bore for ‘counting numbers’. In an effort to solve the conundrum, he asked himself what those being made redundant thought. Did they think that he was responsible? “The thing is I don’t think they think it’s *me*. I don’t think it’s *my boss*. They think it’s *them*. But we’re them. But it’s not us. It’s something *above* us. Something up there”.

Nichols and Beynon report that this manager concluded his soliloquy by gazing up at the ceiling. He was at a loss to understand his actions and the extent to which he should take personal responsibility for them. The problem with conventional management textbooks is that such issues are, for the most part, ignored or avoided or consigned to the sub-field of ‘business ethics’. In ‘business ethics’ very little attention is paid to the bigger picture of systemic exploitation and domination. Instead, the focus is upon codes of conduct that, in effect, suggest that complying with the code exhausts manager’s responsibility for their actions, and so contributes to a withering of moral sensibility rather than its enhancement. Management is represented as a set of techniques, including codes of conduct and structures of governance, that are presented as functionally necessary forms of ‘best practice’. Instead of confronting the positioning of

management with capitalist relations of production, the focus is upon the *design* of systems rather than their effects, and upon the *techniques* that professional managers should acquire to ensure their smooth operation, including the procedures and the ‘cooling out’ scripts to be followed when making employees redundant. The emphasis is upon ensuring the smooth(er) running of ‘the machine’ by minimizing the likelihood of legal or moral challenge. In short, mainstream textbooks make sense of management as a technology, and not as a social relation involving fundamental political and ethical issues. When confronted directly with his work as a social relation, the plant manager described above was simply at a loss to make sense of it (see also Exhibit 3).

### **Exhibit 3 Example of Guidance Given to Headteachers Conducting Redundancy Interviews with Staff**

... (9) How Much Needs to be Said?

In conveying the decision the Headteacher should be brief and to the point. Don't beat around the bush. Make the opening as clear as possible, perhaps beginning on the basis that ‘I am afraid that I have some bad news for you’, and then explain exactly what the position is. In doing so it is very important to stress that it is the job which is redundant and not the person. Explain why redundancy is necessary and what selection formula has been used, but do not go into background detail about the circumstances leading up to the decision.

(10) The Length of the Interview

Ten minutes is about right. Experience shows that people are rarely able to take in all of the details immediately anyway, and if there has been effective communication within the Department there will already be a background awareness that redundancies are likely. It is absolutely essential that the employee concerned does receive written details of his or her financial and job position, together with an assurance that they can return for a further interview after the initial shock to clarify any questions they may then have.

Source: Isle of Wight, nd

Over the past two decades or more, much managerial work has itself been intensified and/or rendered increasingly insecure as hierarchies have been somewhat flattened, and restructurings have occurred with ever greater frequency. Career paths have become more uncertain as the comparative safety of specialist, functional ‘chimneys’ are eroded. In this context, it becomes more apparent that many managers are ‘victims’ (in terms of additional stress and job loss), and not

just ‘perpetrators’, of the control systems that they design, operate and control. In many cases, insecurity produces greater compliance although, in the context of continuous change, a passive response becomes riskier. Experiences of tension and conflict may also promote critical reflection upon conventional, managerialist diagnoses of, and prescriptions for, managerial work and an associated interest in doing things differently. Such differences of orientation may include challenging and removing oppressive forms of organization, enabling more meaningful forms of employment, and reducing the carbon footprint of organizations.

### **Making Sense of Management: Unpacking the Received Wisdom**

Received wisdom assures us that, as a consequence of processes of rationalization and modernization, contemporary organizations are managed on an ever more rational basis. Managers are portrayed as the heroes of this transformation: ‘No job is more vital to our society than that of the manager. It is the manager who determines whether our social institutions serve us well or whether they squander our talents and resources’ (Mintzberg, 1975: 61). With the current fashion for leadership, it is now often claimed that ‘leaders’, and not managers, are the ones who undertake the vital tasks in organizations, even though those doing the leadership are invariably managers or ‘executives’. In dominant views, there is very little recognition of leadership in organizations not exercised by managers. The manager–leader distinction is fuzzy, not least for managers (Carroll and Levy, 2008; see also Chapter 4); but it has a rhetorical appeal to the vanity of managers. Representations of managerial work as ‘leadership’ often reinforce managerialism as an ideology in which knowledge of how to organize is understood to be distilled in the expertise ascribed to managers. The expertise of managers (whether they are referred to as leaders or not), this soothing doctrine of managerialism continues, establishes them as competent and trusted mediators between the claims of a plurality of stakeholders and interest groups – consumers, suppliers and employees as well as employers. Management education, including leadership training, is supposed to equip managers with the specialist expertise required to make decisions that ensure the efficient and effective fulfilment of the needs of organizations and society. Management – especially if it is beefed up or anointed with ‘leadership’ – provides the golden key to the good society.

The idea that managerial work is guided by the rational calculus of management theory is expressed in the representation of management knowledge as ‘science’, or at least academically respectable forms of knowing.<sup>6</sup> The linking of management to science and in particular university education, has great ideological appeal as it implies neutrality and authority (see Chapter 2). Strong links to universities and in particular business schools assist in securing the exercise of managerial prerogative without any wider social accountability. The so-called sciences of management are abstracted from the cultural and historical contexts of their conception and

application. Teachers and practitioners of management are then spared the unsettling realization that the very formulation of 'scientific' management theories, as well as their implementation, occur within politically charged, value-laden contexts. When managers are considered to have access to the academic body of knowledge for managing complex systems, as distilled in business degrees, the logical conclusion to be drawn is that they must be allowed to apply this knowledge without much hindrance.

Yet, paradoxically, it is precisely inexact, contextually sensitive forms of knowledge that are often most valued and celebrated by practising managers who are sceptical about forms of knowledge that claim to have universal applicability. A premium is placed upon 'gut knowledge' and 'feel' that lacks or defies 'scientific' justification. Texts that are attentive to the trickier aspects of practice – such as the politics of management – are often deemed to be most 'realistic' by practitioners, as long as they embrace a managerialism agenda, and so not reflect too deeply on the legitimacy of managerial prerogative.

But most management texts – textbooks, pop-business writings but also many research texts – disregard the trickier aspects of practice. As Susman and Evered (1978: 584) have observed, 'Many of the findings in our scholarly management journals are only remotely related to the real world of practising managers and to the actual issues with which members of organizations are concerned, especially when research has been carried out by the most rigorous methods of the prevailing conception of science.' In a similar vein, Bedeian (1989), when speaking as the President of the American Academy of Management, has referred to the mountain of 'mindless research' that 'often restates the obvious'. If management academics persist in being mindless, he concludes, they 'will continue to deserve the criticism so commonly sent our way by the popular press' (*ibid.*: 14). If, as the observations of Bedeian indicate, much academic research on management has little immediate practical relevance for managers, it is relevant to ask why such 'mindless' research continues to be funded by government and business.

In addressing this question, it is relevant to note how, as areas of academic enquiry and as forms of social practice, management and organization are not only fuzzy and ambiguous but also continuously under (re)construction. They are shaped and changed by shifts in the social and economic conditions that form the corporate landscape over time (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Such changes are brought about in part by the diffusion of management knowledge. As management knowledge is taken to be authoritative, it has truth effects as new social realities are produced. As a consequence, it is most unlikely that studies of management will deliver precise or stable results. In our view, this limitation does not imply that little can be learned from empirical studies or from theories. On the contrary, these can inform, enrich and challenge our understanding, but only when we maintain a critical distance from their claims. It is important to be aware of how, in most areas of management, a diversity of perspectives and theories have been developed that commend different and contradictory diagnoses and recipes for change. Appreciating the significance of debates and productive conflicts about

management knowledge is integral to developing a critical perspective (Palmer and Hardy, 2000).

Advocates and sponsors of research carried out using what are regarded as ‘the most rigorous methods of the prevailing conception of science’ (Susman and Evered, 1978: 584) may believe that, eventually, their findings will justify the investment by delivering universal truths and reliable recipes for success. Evidence of resistance to such knowledge by managers (and by scholars who are less bullish about their knowledge claims) may be interpreted by its producers as evidence of ‘pre-’ or ‘un-scientific’ or ‘unprofessional’ thinking for which the obvious remedy is additional research and better training. A rather different interpretation of why research based upon a conception of science attributable to the physical sciences continues to attract support from funders and the gatekeepers of management scholarship is not simply because of a naïve belief in its emulation of the physical sciences but because the scientization of management bestows upon management a valuable – even magical – aura. In doing this, it conveys the image of impartial experts whose prerogative is strongly associated with, if not as yet firmly founded upon, scientifically respectable bodies of knowledge (Thomas, 1993). As Pfeffer has commented:

It is certainly nobler to think of oneself as developing skills toward the more efficient allocation and use of resources – implicitly for the greater good of society as a whole – than to think of oneself as engaged with other organizational participants in a political struggle over values, preferences and definitions of technology. (1981: 12)

Much, even all, academic research on management is disdainfully viewed as useless mumbo-jumbo by practitioners who see little that is relevant or meaningful in its baroque representation within the most highly regarded academic journals. Such research is nonetheless supported, or at least tolerated, because its association with science, and in particular with the university (and the business school), however spurious, provides the ‘expertise’ of management with a valuable veneer of authority and respectability. Just as reports by management consultants serve to legitimize decisions by executives whose impartiality might otherwise have been questioned, ‘scientific’ research in management lends legitimacy to the work of managers and serves to justify managerial prerogative and privilege. This is not to deny that some managers may find some management research of relevance to their careers. But, in general, it seems to be valued only when it is packaged and presented in a manner that renders it accessible, and its lessons are formulated in less abstract and cautious ways, e.g. in pop-management texts with brash titles such as *In Search of Excellence* or *From Good to Great*, offering easily digested blueprints for delivering corporate peak performance(s). What remains problematic, however, is the conversion of academic research into usable, managerially acceptable techniques that, aside from their preoccupation with providing quick fixes for practitioners, take little account of the particular contexts and wider consequences of their application.

## Making Sense of Management: Sketching a Critical Perspective

In response to our criticisms of mainstream accounts of management, it could be objected that they present a comparatively easy target for critical analysis. Our defence is that reputable textbooks and journals are the basic storehouses of contemporary understanding of management, so they are important and legitimate targets of criticism. That said, it is necessary to acknowledge and address conceptions of management which diverge, in various ways, from the received wisdom. In this section, we concentrate upon work that begins to take into account how management theory and practice are shot through with ideology and politics.

### ***'Progressive' Conceptions of Management and the Extension of Technocracy***

A conventional criticism of established, classical conceptions of management is that they fail to recognize how, in practice, management decision making is 'bounded' by limited information, limited brain power and by pressures to reach 'closure' before all options are thoroughly subjected to rational scrutiny and evaluation (March and Simon, 1958). This criticism usefully draws attention to the practicalities of managerial work in which the ('rational', 'scientific') process of reaching optimal decisions is compromised by the intrusion of 'realities' that will not wait for the optimal solution.

Later studies have extended this criticism to argue that decision making is affected by managers' particular allegiances, preconceptions, preoccupations and hunches (Pettigrew, 1973). It is their recipes and 'biases' that, in part, compensate for lack of timely information and a limited capacity to process information, and so are seen to account for deviations from the formal, rationalist logic of classical management theory.<sup>7</sup> The role of 'hunches' and 'gut feel', is, from a rational standpoint, symptomatic of an 'unscientific' legacy, and this invites a redoubling of scientific efforts to place decision making upon a sound basis. However, it may be doubted whether it is ever possible to cleanse such processes and remove such influences considering that management is a social, not a technical, practice. From this perspective, managerial decision making is seen to be 'an essentially political process in which constraints and opportunities are functions of the power exercised by decision-makers in the light of ideological values' (Child, 1972: 16, emphasis added).

Studies that pay attention to the politics of organizational decision making and the conditioning of managerial work by ideological values, including the self-preservation of managers, provide a valuable counterbalance to the over-rationalized textbook picture of management. Yet, studies that focus upon the micropolitics of management are often limited in their critical penetration as they proceed as if the question of 'management for what?' were either self-evident or beyond debate. Their limitations become evident when they simply extend the technocratic range



of management theory to the rational control of values. Their technocratic message to managers is that they should learn to become more aware of how values shape their perceptions, and/or appreciate the operation of organizational politics, as this would enable them to act more effectively. As Pettigrew (1985: 314–6, emphasis added) writes:

Changing business strategies has to involve a process of *ideological and political change* that eventually releases a new concept of strategy that is culturally acceptable within a newly appreciated context. In the broadest sense, this means, prescriptively, that step one in a change process should be to improve and build upon any natural processes of change by tackling questions such as how existing processes can be speeded up, how the conditions that determine people's interpretations of situations can be altered, and how contexts can be mobilized toward legitimate problems and solutions along the way to move the organization additively in a different strategic direction.

Analysis and prescriptions for managerial work may pay some attention to what Pettigrew terms 'ideological and political change'. All too often, however, such attention is narrowly focused upon 'ideological and political' aspects of organizing simply as a means of smoothing a process of top-down change. Established priorities are on the whole assumed to be legitimate. Proposed 'change' addresses means but not ends.<sup>8</sup> Insights into the context and dynamics of organizational change are not prized for their capacity to stimulate debate upon the legitimacy of current priorities. Instead, these insights are selectively developed and engaged as a technology geared to minimizing conflict associated with taking 'a different strategic direction'. The emphasis is upon bolstering established means and recipes of management control (e.g. bureaucratic rules and procedures) through the strategic (re) engineering of employee thinking and values in line with the 'new concept of strategy' and the 'legitimate problems and solutions' – as identified by top management or their consultants and mainstream academics. It might be asked: 'what is wrong with that?' Our answer is that it is inadequate insofar as it disregards the wider context of institutionalized power relations in which management practice is embedded. It also perpetuates a philosophy of management in which an expedient concern to maintain the status quo (e.g. by managing the values of employees) displaces any concern with the transformation of work organizations in the direction of increased democracy and collective self-determination.

### **The Case of 'Tech'**

The mobilization of cultural means of controlling employees (including managers) is studied in depth by Gideon Kunda (1992) in his research on 'Tech', a company celebrated by commentators for its creativity and progressive, people-oriented style of management. The following excerpt is illustrative of how employees at Tech are surrounded by, and continuously subjected to, a distinct and integrated corporate culture:

Tom O'Brien has been around the company for a while; like many others, he has definite ideas about 'Tech Culture'. ... But, as he is constantly reminded, so does the company. When he arrives at work, he encounters evidence of the company point of view at every turn. ... Inside the building where he works, just beyond the security desk, a large television monitor is playing a videotape of a recent speech by Sam Miller (the founder and president). As Tom walks by, he hears the familiar voice discuss 'our goals, our values, and the way we do things'. ... As he sits down in his office space, Tom switches on his terminal. ... On his technet mail he notices among the many communications another announcement of the afternoon events: a memo titled, 'How Others See Our Values', reviewing excerpts on Tech Culture from recent managerial bestsellers. ... In his mail, he finds *Techknowledge*, one of the company's newsletters. On the cover is a big picture of Sam Miller against the background of a giant slogan – 'We Are One'. He also finds an order form for company publications, including Ellen Cohen's *Culture Operating Manual*. ... The day has hardly begun, yet Tom is already surrounded by 'the culture', the ever-present signs of the company's explicit concern with its employees' state of mind (and heart). (ibid.: 50–2)

This passage conveys the idea of Tech as an institution in which employees are continuously bombarded by positive images of the company and messages about what is expected of them. Employees are not, however, necessarily submissive participants in processes of corporate brainwashing. Unlike the automatons portrayed in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or Huxley's *Brave New World*, employees bring alternative values and priorities to their work. Through processes of distancing and irony, Tech employees are able to expose and deflate the use of high sounding corporate rhetoric and thereby counteract the strategic engineering of norms and values. That said, Kunda's study also discloses a darker side of Tech's corporate culture. Tech culture readily accommodates and exploits a degree of employee wilfulness and resistance – in the form of the parodying of values and expectations. Indeed, Tech employees were not discouraged from interpreting tolerant ridiculing of Tech ideology as a confirmation of the company's ostensibly liberal ethos.

The most pervasive and insidious effect of Tech culture was its repressive tolerance of dissent (Marcuse, 1964). Tech's capacity to accommodate and disarm its critics, Kunda suggests, was more effective in stifling organized forms of resistance than a more coercive, heavy-handed approach that would have aroused resistance: 'in the name of humanism, enlightenment and progress, the engineers of Tech culture elicit the intense efforts of employees not by stirring their experiential life, but, if anything, by degrading and perhaps destroying it' (Kunda, 1992: 224–5). Kunda shows how modern ideologies – humanism, enlightenment and progress – are mobilized, often in subliminal ways, to legitimize demands upon employees (see Fleming, 2009). Yet, despite the repressive tolerance engendered by Tech culture, the frustrations and psychological degradations experienced by its employees prompted many of them to develop and amplify countervailing images of this seemingly benevolent organization. These were, however, seldom integrated into a coherent and clear stance. Instead, employees expressed distance and irony, which functioned more like a

safety mechanism, blowing off some steam, while affirming the liberal ethos nurtured by senior management. In effect, Tech employees, including its managers, mainly acted out the corporate requirements of a strong overt commitment to the organization, regardless of what they thought privately. They worked very hard and, on the whole, were resigned to their fate of becoming exhausted and burned-out. (Such ‘decaf resistance’ (Contu, 2009), pseudo-resistance or faking autonomy is not uncommon – see Fleming and Spicer, 2003; Kärreman and Alvesson, 2009.)

Management control is rarely based entirely upon seeking the active consent, as contrasted with conditional compliance, of the managed. As a consequence, managers develop forms of inducement and punishment through which they strive to minimize forms of misbehaviour, resistance and dissent. Wherever inequalities are not founded upon unforced consent, it is necessary to develop ideologies (e.g. the prerogative of management to manage based upon their superior, impartial expertise) that aspire to justify the exclusion of ‘the managed’ from participating in making decisions (and meanings) that directly affect their lives. Such ideologies legitimize technocracy – a system of (corporate) governance ‘in which technically trained experts rule by virtue of their specialized knowledge and position in dominant political and economic institutions’ (Fischer, 1990: 17).

The paradox of post-classical, ‘progressive’ management texts and ideologies – which emphasize a loosening bureaucratic control and managerial supervision in favour of greater self-discipline – is that they simultaneously go some way towards debunking the rationalist pretensions of conventional management thinking and facilitate the application of more sophisticated technologies of control that, in principle, serve to extend the jurisdiction of management. Such ostensibly ‘progressive’ interventions aspire, and serve, to advance and legitimize an expansion of management’s manipulation of elements of culture and identity in order to expand and strengthen systems of control. Their ways of making (sense of) management exclude sustained consideration of how, historically, the objectives and functions of management are defined, refined and pursued through processes of moral and political struggle.

### Managers as Agents and Targets of Instrumental Reason

The moral and political dimensions of managerial work are illustrated by Jackall’s *Moral Mazes* (1988) which explores how managers deal with dissonance between their personal values and the demands of the corporation to transgress these values (see also Dalton, 1959). The dissonance is routinely attenuated, Jackall argues, by complying with ‘what the guy above you wants from you’ (ibid.: 6). What (s)he wants is not just compliance with organizational rules or values but a *particular form* of compliance that safeguards their power and status, yet which can be plausibly represented as congruent with corporate rules (accepted techniques and procedures). This compliance co-exists, and often overlaps with, a strong focus on instrumentality: ‘technique and procedure tend to become ascendant over substantive reflection about organizational goals ... *Even at higher levels of management, one sees ample evidence*

*of an overriding emphasis on technique rather than on critical reasoning*' (Jackall, 1988: 76, emphasis added). In other words, 'what the guy above you wants from you' is privileged so as to curry favour with him or her, but in a manner that affirms its legitimacy in terms of compliance with available techniques and procedures. Actions are then based upon the demands of superordinates and conformity with technical considerations without regard to a wider set of concerns or any ambition to develop independent thinking. It is worth noting how this emphasis upon technique and procedure receives widespread approval from shareholders (and, in the public sector, from politicians). That is because compliance with their procedural requirements promises to limit the otherwise ill-defined boundaries of managerial discretion.

However, endorsement of a technocratic ideology does not place managers in an unequivocally secure position. The logic of neutrality 'demands' that managerial work is to be subjected to the same rationalizing processes that managers visit upon their subordinates (Clarke et al., 2009; Smith, 1990). Even without the development of powerful information technologies, which have eliminated the work of many supervisors and managers, programmes of employee involvement and corporate-culture strengthening require the internalization of supervisory responsibilities among multi-skilled, self-disciplined operatives. As some of the responsibility for managing and checking subordinates' work is devolved to workers, there is less need for managers who have been the targets of de-layering in 'lean', 'reengineered' organizations. Insofar as managers accept and internalize a technocratic ideology, they are ill-prepared to make sense of, let alone resist, developments that pose a threat to their very existence. Management and managing is, in short, bedevilled by tensions and contradictions that mainstream management is largely impotent to acknowledge and address.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

Supplying an answer to the question 'what is management?' is by no means as straightforward as many texts on management are inclined to suggest. Received wisdom takes it for granted that the social divisions between managers and managed are either natural (e.g. based upon superior intelligence and education) and/or functionally necessary. Conceiving of management in this way is symptomatic of sense-making that conflates management as a *social* practice with a body of *technical* expertise. As Knights and Murray (1994: 31) observe, 'a great deal of managerial practice constructs a reality of its own activity that denies the *political* quality of that practice.' As we have sought to show, such denial is itself central to the institutionalized politics of management where 'the political' is suppressed by being normalized as the prerogative of experts. In other words, silencing consideration of the political formation and application of management knowledge and practice is integral to bestowing legitimacy upon managers.

When the 'political quality' of management practice is denied, the costs – personal, social and ecological – of enhancing growth, productivity, quality and profit are disregarded. Scant attention is paid to the increase in stress, the loss of autonomy in

work, the cultivation of consumerist values or the degradation of the environment – all of which are associated with the drive for ‘efficient management’. Indeed, there is a well-rehearsed response to anyone who raises such issues which runs along the following lines: business is responsible for the production of wealth; personal, social and ecological problems are the preserve of individuals and governments; and government has the task of developing viable, effective (and preferably minimal) forms of regulation to facilitate (fair) competition. When some wider responsibility of corporations is acknowledged (e.g. toxic impact, inadequate supervision or inappropriate incentives), it is claimed that many problems have come to light only recently; and that experts will, in due course, ensure their correction. Or that better management – perhaps cultivated by business ethics statements, corporate social responsibility initiatives or moves from ‘management’ to ‘leadership’ – will address these concerns.

Conventional wisdom invites us to celebrate the contribution of management to corporate and national wealth and to the satisfaction of people’s needs for employment, job satisfaction, goods and so forth. We are urged to regard managerial work as a positive and central feature of modern, pluralistic societies. Management knowledge is equated with rationality as the basis of the good society. Rarely is the darker side of management acknowledged, and then it is presented as an aberrant deviation from a normal, beneficial and sustainable state of affairs. Knowledge of management is overwhelming *for* management, not an examination *of* management.

Of course, it is highly likely that the opposite complaint – namely, that we have little to say about the brighter side of management theory – will be levelled against this text. Critical writing books, like this, are in the genre of tragedies, and paint a gloomy, even depressing view of things (Fineman, 2006). We acknowledge the difficulty of achieving a balanced view of management that is neither simply ‘pro’ or ‘anti’ (see also Spicer et al., 2009). The difficulty of attaining such balance, we believe, can be related to the contradictions of management theory and practice discussed earlier. ‘Balance’ is in the eye of the beholder. From a perspective that values critical reflection as a key resource for democracy, ecological stewardship and sustainability, mainstream management thinking is self-serving for a status quo that systematically subverts these values. Such thinking invites, or provokes, the development of an *antithesis* that is outrightly hostile to management in any shape or form. We have distanced our analysis from what we regard as a utopian position that rejects the possibility of management having any legitimate place in democratic organizations; and that calls for the elimination of management as the only progressive course of action. We are certainly not against management; indeed as senior academics we are to some extent engaged in it and believe it is an important part of contemporary life that we need to think positively *and* critically about. Some ideas intended as a contribution to a *synthesis* are sketched in Chapters 7 and 8. For the moment, it may be helpful to summarize a number of the central understandings, themes and concerns of this text.

- *Management is a social practice.* Its content, both theoretical and practical, is embedded in the historical and cultural relations of power and domination (e.g. capitalism, patriarchy) that enable/impede its emergence and development.

- *Mainstream thinking* represents management practices as objective/impartial/scientific/technically superior. It normalizes and obfuscates how power relations shape the formation and organization of management.
- *Tensions exist* between the lived reality of management as a politically charged process and its 'official' representation as a set of impartial techniques for directing and coordinating human and material resources.
- *Critical studies of management* recognize, expose and examine these tensions. Instead of seeking to mitigate the tensions through the refinement of techniques, often sanctified by appeals to 'science', 'humanism' and so on, critical studies anticipate the possibility of resolving them through a transformation of social relations (e.g. changing the mind-sets and institutions that foster patriarchal practices or ecological damage).
- *Critical studies are also a product of prevailing relations of power.* The existence of critical studies is dependent upon tensions (see above) which stimulate reflection upon conventional theory and practice. The embeddedness of critical thinking in power relations renders its own claims partial and provisional.
- *Critical studies may reconstruct received wisdom* (e.g. about management). Reconstruction provides an alternative body of knowledge but without any necessary change either in the person (e.g. a manager) who adopts this analysis or in their practical actions.
- *Reconstruction becomes critique* when it inspires and guides processes of personal and social transformation.
- *Critical studies seek to illuminate and transform institutions and social relations* despite being embedded in these relations. Such studies provide alternative frameworks for interpreting the practices of management, and facilitate a process of radical change as envisaged and struggled for by progressive social movements.
- *Emancipatory transformation occurs as people change*, personally or collectively, by changing habits and institutions that impede the development of greater autonomy and responsibility. Responsibility depends upon the practical realization of the interdependence of human beings and our interdependence with nature. Autonomy depends upon the development of institutions in which individualism is problematized and minimized, thereby allowing the unimpeded realization of interdependence.

In the place of self-serving images of managers – as impartial experts, 'go-getters' and 'do-gooders' – it is vital to attend to the pressures that lead management to be in the business of the unremitting exploitation of nature and human beings. Their work results in national and international extremes of wealth and poverty, the creation of global pollution, the promotion of 'needs' for consumer products, etc. Caught in the maelstrom of capitalist organization, managers are urged or induced to emulate, normalize and reward all kinds of manipulative and destructive behaviour. As Shrivastava (1994b: 238) has observed of mainstream management thinking, 'it is widely believed that corporations are generally beneficial, neutral, technological "systems of production" that equally serve the interests of many stakeholders ... This assumption ignores the destructive aspects of corporate activities.' 'Greenwashing', where corporations manage an impression of ecological concern to conceal their destructive impact, is perhaps a particularly nauseating example of the abuse of corporate powers (Jermier

and Forbes, 2003). Another is the dedicated follower of fashions, brands and lifestyles, who defines him or herself through commercial and consumerist discourses and is narcissistically preoccupied with a fluctuating and vulnerable sense of self, targeted by ads and promotions pointing at discrepancies between ideals of perfection and glamour, and the imperfections of body and actual appearance.

The capacity of human beings to reflect and think critically makes it possible to question the direction of mainstream management theory and practice and to challenge its self-justifications. In principle, management could be dedicated to providing a basic level of primary goods for the world's population, acting in ways that are ecologically sound and facilitating processes of collective self-determination. All too often, however, the social and ecological destructiveness of contemporary management practice is pursued by appealing to a rhetoric of 'progress', 'efficiency' and, most recently, 'ethics'. This provokes critical reflection in response to pathological consequences of 'progress': the gross exploitation of natural and unrenovable resources and associated pollution; extreme and obscene inequalities of wealth and opportunity, nationally and internationally; and institutionalized discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, age and so on. The contradictory effects of mainstream management theory and practice stimulate alternative visions and struggles for a more rational social and economic order. Precisely because capitalism is so productive in generating wealth, yet systemically incapable of distributing its bounty to those most disadvantaged by its operation, diverse forms of 'critical publicity' continue to be thrown up – most recently by the strength of ecological and 'global-justice' movements.

Integral to the emancipatory intent of critical thinking is a vision of a different form of management: one that is more democratically accountable to all whose lives are affected by management decisions. From this perspective, management and organizations become substantively rational only when governed through decision-making processes that take direct account of the will and priorities<sup>10</sup> of diverse stakeholders who include employees, consumers and citizens – rather than being dependent upon the priorities of an elite of self-styled experts, both financial and managerial. These priorities cannot, however, be taken at face value: key to functioning democracy is ambitious critical reflection and dialogue (Deetz, 1992a). It would be contradictory to anticipate the precise (re)form of management in advance of its development by democratic processes. What can be said with some confidence, however, is that those responsible for developing and implementing its functions will, of necessity, be attentive and accountable to the concerns and values of a much wider constituency than is presently the case.



## Notes

- 1 The two major strands in the initial development of critical management theory have been Labour Process Analysis (LPA: Thompson, 2009) and Critical Theory (see Alvesson, 1987; Scherer, 2009). In LPA, management is analysed as a medium of control which secures the exploitation of labour by capital (Braverman, 1974;

Knights and Willmott, 1990). In Critical Theory, management is studied more in relation to the domination of technocratic thinking and practices, and the associated emasculation of critical thinking, autonomy and democratic decision making, and not in terms of the logic of the capital–labour relation that makes the organized working class its agent of revolutionary transformation. See Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion of Critical Theory.

- 2 Hierarchical organization can be of value in coordinating complex, technical divisions of labour when it has a democratic mandate. What is problematical is not hierarchical organization *per se* – to a degree this is necessary and productive, at least in large organizations (see du Gay, 1994) – but there is often unjustifiable reliance upon it (Child, 2009). It is also used to bolster and institutionalize structures of class, gender and ethnic domination.
- 3 Watson (1994) relates how, following individual interviews with their new boss, Paul Syston, a number of the managers reported that he had said very little and had given them scant indication of his plans.
- 4 In this case, ‘moral virtue’ is framed in terms of the justice of ensuring that the highest performing individuals receive the highest rewards, thereby eliminating the morally indefensible payment of ‘free riders’.
- 5 See [http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/features/Activist-occupy-centenario221110/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+greenpeace%2Fallblogs+%28Greenpeace+Blog+Aggregator%3A+All+our+blogs+in+one+feed%29](http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/features/Activist-occupy-centenario221110/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+greenpeace%2Fallblogs+%28Greenpeace+Blog+Aggregator%3A+All+our+blogs+in+one+feed%29).
- 6 Even where the term ‘science’ is not explicitly used, or where management is presented as a ‘practice’ mediated by diverse cultural values and political systems, the basic message is maintained. As Drucker (1977: 25), a leading management guru, expresses this understanding: ‘The management function, the work of management, its tasks and its dimensions are universal and do not vary from country to country.’
- 7 In part, this development was stimulated by the internationalizing of management and the rapid economic growth of Asian economies, which have fostered a growing awareness of how management practices are embedded in and expressive of national cultures. An emergent knowledge of management practices in other countries, notably Japan in the 1970s and 1980s, made it increasingly difficult to believe that practices which appear ‘irrational’ from a Western standpoint pose any significant obstacle to achieving the conventional goal of profitable growth (see Pascale and Athos, 1982).
- 8 For example, in business schools, the inclusion of electives in ‘business ethics’ or the espousal of (pseudo) ‘participative styles’ of managing tends to exemplify rather than challenge the acquisition and application of abstract techniques and idealized prescriptions.
- 9 For example, the strengthening of corporate culture, which encourages employees to identify more closely with the mission of their organization, may succeed insofar as a stronger sense of collective purpose assuages individual employees’ experience of vulnerability and insecurity. However, there remain underlying



tensions between the collectivist ideas disseminated by the gurus of corporate culture and deeply embedded Enlightenment beliefs in 'individual freedom' and, more specifically, the operation of 'free' labour markets and individual competitiveness. In the West, the use of labour markets to achieve work discipline creates and promotes the moral vacuum and individualistic behaviour that corporate culture seeks to correct without changing the conditions that operate to undermine the effectiveness of this stratagem as a medium of management control. The limits of individualistic Western management thinking and practice are well illustrated by the departure of Japanese companies from a number of Western management's supposedly 'rational' principles. Locke (1989: 50–1) relates the paradoxical success of this deviation to the absence in Japanese history of an equivalent to Western Enlightenment. As a consequence, Locke argues, 'the Japanese worker does not think of himself as engaged in an economic function (being an electrical engineer, a production engineer, lathe operator, accountant, etc.) which is divorced from the firm, an occupational function that can be done anywhere. He is a Hitachi man, a Honda man, and so on, a member of a community' (ibid.). The Western worker, in contrast, lacks a deeply engrained ethic that binds each individual, morally as well as economically, to his or her employing organization.

- 10 As we argue and elaborate in subsequent chapters of this book, it is also important not to take expressions of this will and its priorities at face value, but to probe more deeply by encouraging critical reflection upon, and communication about, 'needs' and 'interests' attributed to human beings.