MAKING SENSE OF MANAGEMENT

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTON

MATS ALVESSON & HUGH WILLMOTT

SECOND EDITION

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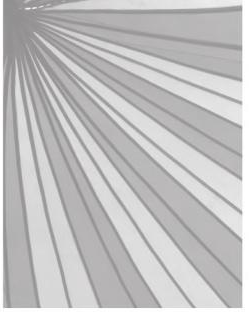

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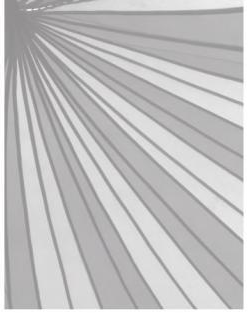

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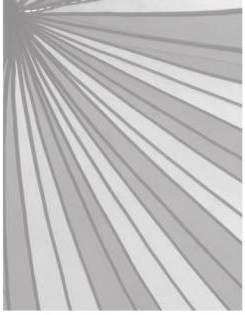

Introduction

Management is simultaneously a target of celebration and complaint, of denigration and recurrent demands for better organizational functioning. Many hail management as a 'holy grail' that will deliver well-functioning institutions and uninterrupted wealth creation. Yet, management is also charged with serial failures with respect to ethics (e.g. bullying, excessive salaries and bonuses), self-aggrandizement (e.g. empire-building, narcissism), recklessness (e.g. unsustainable expansion, excessive cost-cutting) and poor husbandry (e.g. environmental damage). In response, the popular remedy is more management, often of much the same kind but, of course, 'better'. The paradox reflects a drug-like dependence upon 'management'. We expect it to be effective, we complain when it fails, and we repeatedly demand an increase in the dose to restore our confidence.

In the face of its recurrent failures, repeated calls are made for a revitalization of management – notably, by strengthening leadership and/or by flattening hierarchies in which employees are expected to be self-disciplined and self-motivated as they are urged to collaborate in self-organizing teams led by managers capable of harnessing the potential of these human resources. Such initiatives are invariably dressed up in the language of innovation and the liberation of human potential from restrictive practices and outmoded structures. Yet, these initiatives rarely lead to radical change. Social divisions, global inequalities and damaging ecological consequences tend to be intensified, not reversed. There is talk of empowerment and responsibility – notably, with regard to the husbandry of human and natural resources. Yet, with few exceptions, such talk remains tightly harnessed to business priorities that routinely trivialize, exploit or override any deep or sustained commitment to emancipatory change.

In effect, more sophisticated forms of control (e.g. through culture, team working, branding etc.) are presented as liberating media for the development of ostensibly enlightened, progressive forms of management. As management monopolizes control, other organizations (e.g. unions) dedicated to articulating and defending the concerns of employees, consumers and citizens are rendered redundant. This contemporary, totalizing, neo-paternalistic conception of management extends beyond the workplace to the environment where, as Bavington (2010: 4) observes, discredited management thinking is enlisted to address ecological degradation and crisis (see also Parker, 2002):

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Despite proclamations by environmental scholars about worldwide crises, pathologies, and even the end of management itself, managerial interventions remain firmly mapped across the face of the Earth and stand unchallenged as the dominant legitimized response to a host of social, political, economic and ecological problems.

Despite mounting crises – of energy and food as well as finance and ecology – contemporary business, management and working life continue to be presented in a highly positive, celebratory light. We are told that we live in a 'knowledge society' (which has advanced rapidly from a service society to an information society before becoming a knowledge society). We are led to believe that the application of advanced knowledge, in the form of sophisticated technical fixes organized by good management, will extricate us from the crises that now envelop us. The knowledge workers, notably managers, are identfied as the key to our salvation.[1] In this narrative of salvation, it is widely taken for granted that 'the foundation of industrial economies has shifted from natural resources to intellectual assets' (Hansen et al., 1999: 106) and it is frequently claimed that 'many sectors are animated by new economics, where the payoff to managing knowledge astutely has been dramatically amplified' (Teece, 1998: 55). Management in the era of the knowledge society is, we are told, about developing competence, innovation, networking, developing corporate cultures and working with branding, not about controlling and exploiting the labour force. Most employees who are subject to 'managerial competence' do not find this credible; nor do we.

The representation of a 'new paradigm' of management – from the exploiters of labour in bureaucracies to the coaches of creative knowledge-workers in post-bureaucracies – is paralleled in the realm of consumption where consumers are increasingly conceived as co-constructors of value. They are seen not only to engage in forms of self-service and internet shopping but also in the co-creation of an 'affective intensity, an experience of unity between the brand and the subject' (Arvidsson, 2006: 93). Whereas 'old' management 'sought to discipline an unruly workforce into adapting certain pre-programmed forms of behaviour' (2006: 41), today, Arvidsson claims, 'in almost every case, it is the other way around'. Today, management respects and engages 'the freedom of the employee, aligning his or her self-realization with the interest of the organization' (2006: 42). There are, of course, some plausible elements in this view, insofar as greater responsibility is placed upon employees to exercise their 'freedom' in a manner that is value-enhancing for the organization. In the absence of such elements, the claim would be widely regarded as improbable rather than enticing. For readers who are attracted to this alluring image, this book will either be totally unappealing – or it will present an interesting challenge.

That an overwhelming majority of academics, consultants and business journalists make reassuring claims about management does not mean that they must be uncritically accepted, at least not without some qualifications and reservations. Such positive claims, we will suggest, are motivated partly by self-serving concerns

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to lend legitimacy to management practices that are socially divisive and ecologically destructive. Flattering images of management operate more successfully as ideology than they do as convincing, nuanced descriptions of contemporary business, working life and its trends. They form a key part of the 'knowledge worker/society' narrative that contains grains of truth presented as sizeable, indisputable rocks. As Thompson et al. (2001) argue, key growth areas of employment – insofar as these exist at all following the faith placed in the managers of investment banks are in low level service jobs, such as serving, guarding, cleaning and helping in health, personal and care services. In these sectors, organizations and work tasks are more convincingly likened to 'McDonaldization' (Ritzer, 1996), where each operation is bureaucratically specified and checked, than to the flowering of a knowledge society. Likewise, more systematic studies and reviews of the degree of debureaucratization in contemporary organizations show only modest support for the idea of its demise, let alone its abolition (Alvesson and Thompson, 2005; McSweeney, 2006). The 'audit society', with growing layers of unproductive surveillance and checking, is perhaps a more compelling characterization (Power, 1999). Understood in this light, references to 'post-bureaucracy' act more effectively as a means of legitimating change and marketing new ideas than as credible indicators, or even as desirable features, of changing forms of work organization (Willmott, 2011a), let alone debureaucratization. Such ideas and references reflect a strong premium placed by academics as well as by consultants and practitioners on labelling and investigating what is perceived to be novel (Alvesson and Thompson, 2005). They are a manifestation of a managerialist obsession with justifying the existence of management by asserting and celebrating its central importance in championing and implementing innovation and change.

These are complex issues that call for on-going debate and critical scrutiny. Various elites and other groups are eager to sell positive messages about an improving world of work, or an even brighter future. By promoting such casual sophistry, they hope to induce a positive, up-beat message. But any serious interest in knowledge issues calls for sharper and more sceptical assessments of truth claims and their effects. One of the greatest strengths of social science is that it offers resources for exercising critical judgment. What, then, do we mean by management? For us, management is a set of techniques and disciplines that promises to address problems that are defined as soluble by the technical solutions that it provides. In the modern era, management is a medium of technocracy where experts, in the guise of managers or executives, are assumed to possess a monopoly of expertise relevant for problem-solving. By definition, non-experts – workers, citizens, consumers – are deemed to lack such expertise and therefore can, at best, play a marginal role in addressing problems, or in assessing how problems are framed, or what solutions are to be given priority. And, yet, as Bavington (2010: 116) reminds us, when considering the application of management to the husbandry of fish stocks, and the unintended consequence of their prospective annihilation,

> framing the world as a set of problems amenable to fixing helps to sustain the illusion that solutions to all problems are to be found a more determined application of

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rationally organized expertise encapsulated in management theory and practice. John Ralston Saul warns us that, 'in a civilization that has mistaken management techniques for moral values, all answers are a trap'.

We believe that the theory and practice of management is poorly served by books that lack a critical perspective on the challenges and dilemmas currently confronting those working and managing in modern organizations. As social and ecological problems pile up in the global economy, there is an eerie sound comparable to deckchairs being rearranged and repaired on the *Titanic*. Instead of addressing more fundamental questions about the defensibility and sustainability of our wasteful and divisive global economy, attention is focused upon ostensibly novel ways of maintaining them by regenerating management practice – for example, by advocating 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR), and by commending the potency of certain (e.g. transformative) types of leadership. Commercial concerns about the inflexibility and poor responsiveness of established organizational practices have resonated with expressions of disillusionment with the effectiveness of established (e.g. bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic) means of organizing. But very little consideration has been given to the rationality and/or accountability of contemporary management theory and practice in relation to fundamental values and goals. This should perhaps come as no surprise with regard to management in the private sector when, as Crouch (2011: 172) observes, 'Exercises of nepotism and favouritism that attract strong criticism in the political sphere pass as normal behaviour in business.'

Where, then, do we turn for ideas that can provide a different and challenging understanding of management theory and practice, and that may supply the basis for an alternative to its present forms? We have already indicated that traditions of social philosophy and social science – especially those which have questioned received wisdoms – can provide an important, yet largely neglected, source of guidance and inspiration. Notably (but not exclusively), the tradition of Critical Theory (see Chapter 2) and associated currents of thought have relevance for such a project. Why Critical Theory? Because it is interdisciplinary and not doctrinaire; and because it has been wrestling for decades with issues concerning management that are now increasingly acknowledged to be problematical for human well-being – such as the mindless equation of scientific development with social progress, the destructive effects of consumerism and commercialization, and the tendency of the modern state to equate policies (e.g. deregulation) intended to enhance and/or legitimize capitalist accumulation with the development of a more civilized, caring and just society. At the very least, such critical thinking can place in question a benevolent image of management by situating its formation and representation in a wider context of relations of inequality and domination – economic, gendered and ethnic – that managers endeavour to stabilize so that they can be perpetuated.

In drawing upon critical traditions of social science, such as Critical Theory, we make no claim to provide comprehensive coverage of all issues relevant for making sense of management. We have not sought to offer a more wide-ranging view of the

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political and economic contexts of management which, in any case, has been developed by those who are better equipped to produce such an account (e.g. Kellner, 1989; Harvey, 1991; Davis, 2009). Our more modest ambition is to present an introductory sketch of management which, we hope, can assist in the process of questioning and transforming practices that are needlessly wasteful, harmful and divisive.

Knowledges of Management – Conventional and Critical

Doubts about the value of established management ideas and practices have coincided with an acceptance and expansion of management as a subject of academic study. In combination, these developments have supported the emergence of innovative ways of making sense of management that depart from conventional assumptions and prescriptions, often by drawing selectively upon ideas developed within the social sciences.

Scientific thinking has been venerated in modern societies even if most people have very limited knowledge of science, despite becoming better educated. In effect, this relation to (or ignorance of) to science establishes the normality of relying upon a cadre of 'experts', or technocrats, as an alternative to engaging in collective self-determination. In the sphere of organization and work, it is widely accepted that the most taxing and recurrent problems are people-centred rather than technical in character. It is not surprising, therefore, to find social scientific ideas being used to diagnose and address these problems and, in particular, to inform the theory and practice of management. This role of reason (in the guise of forms of social science) in renovating managerial practice raises an interesting question. What kind of social scientific knowledge has most relevance?

This question cannot be answered without first determining *who* it is relevant for. If what counts as relevance is decided by the 'experts' – e.g. managers – then the adoption of social scientific knowledge will be quite limited and narrow. It will exclude knowledge that questions the expertise of management and, especially, knowledge which deconstructs or challenges the legitimacy of managerial prerogative. In other words, if a managerialist conception of relevance is assumed, the scope for critical reflection on management is impoverished. For it is restricted to what is self-serving, or what can be selectively adopted to increase the power, control and/or prestige of management. When it serves a technocratic order in which experts are the 'rulers', forms of critical reflection are emasculated and domesticated. In effect, the potential for critical reflection to foster democratic self-determination is suppressed.

So, can critical thinking reach beyond forms of knowledge that provide consultants and managers with a swirling pool of ideas and findings for addressing *only* those problems that are defined or predefined by managers and consultants? We believe that it can. In this book, we argue that reason can, and should, have a role that is not confined to its use as a resource for identifying and legitimizing technologies of management control. It is indefensible to restrict reason to the (instrumental) task of refining the means of accomplishing existing ends (e.g.

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Chapter 2 is concerned with setting our 'critical introduction' to management in its intellectual context. We directly confront the argument that management can be, or should be, 'scientific' – in the sense of aspiring to base management upon objective, scientific knowledge that would thereby remove subjectivity and politics from management practice. We challenge the view that knowledge of society, including knowledge of management, is – or ever can be – value-free. Taking the side of Critical Theory, we argue that the purpose of scientific knowledge is to expose dogmas, including those that support domination, and not to replace them with seemingly unassailable (scientific) knowledge. We deploy Burrell and Morgan's (1979) model of different paradigms of knowledge generation to illustrate the diversity of social scientific knowledges and also to locate Critical Theory in relation to analyses of management inspired or influenced by other critical traditions. Finally, we present the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, the principal intellectual inspiration for this book, before signalling some limitations of Critical Theory – a concern to which we return in Chapters 7 and 8.

In Chapters 3–6, we examine the study of management and its sub-specialisms. Chapter 3 considers and illustrates a number of alternative conceptualizations of management and organization. Among other things, we explore the ways in which management can be understood as a form of technocracy, as a process of mystification and as a colonizing power. In Chapters 4–6, we turn our attention to the various sub-disciplines of management. In Chapter 4, we consider the comparatively 'soft' or 'qualitative' specialisms of organization theory, leadership and human resource management where we present a brief overview of the focus and variety of perspectives within each specialism. We then explore the contribution of studies that challenge or overturn conventional wisdom within each specialism, especially those studies that are directly indebted to Critical Theory and other streams of critical thinking. Chapter 5 addresses marketing and strategic management specialisms that stand in between the soft and the hard areas of management. Chapter 6 considers accounting, operational research and information systems – the comparatively 'hard' or 'quantitative' disciplines. Following a similar pattern to Chapter 4, Chapters 5 and 6 share the purpose of reviewing and illustrating relevant contributions in order to make critical sense of these specialisms.

Chapters 7 and 8 present a series of reflections upon the relevance and value of the approach to making sense of management presented in the previous chapters. Chapter 7 explores the scope for bringing together elements of conventional understandings of management with insights drawn from its critical study. This entails some questioning of the practical relevance and accessibility of Critical Theory – something which, in principle, is consistent with its commitment to self-reflection and autocritique. In particular, we suggest the need to concretize its abstractions, and indeed to 'pollute' the purism of Critical Theory. To this end, we sketch some ideas for the fruitful merging of the insights of Critical Theory and the recurrent preoccupations of management and organization studies. Chapter 8 is more directly concerned with the practice of management as we consider possibilities for the development of management practice that is more defensible, ethically and politically.

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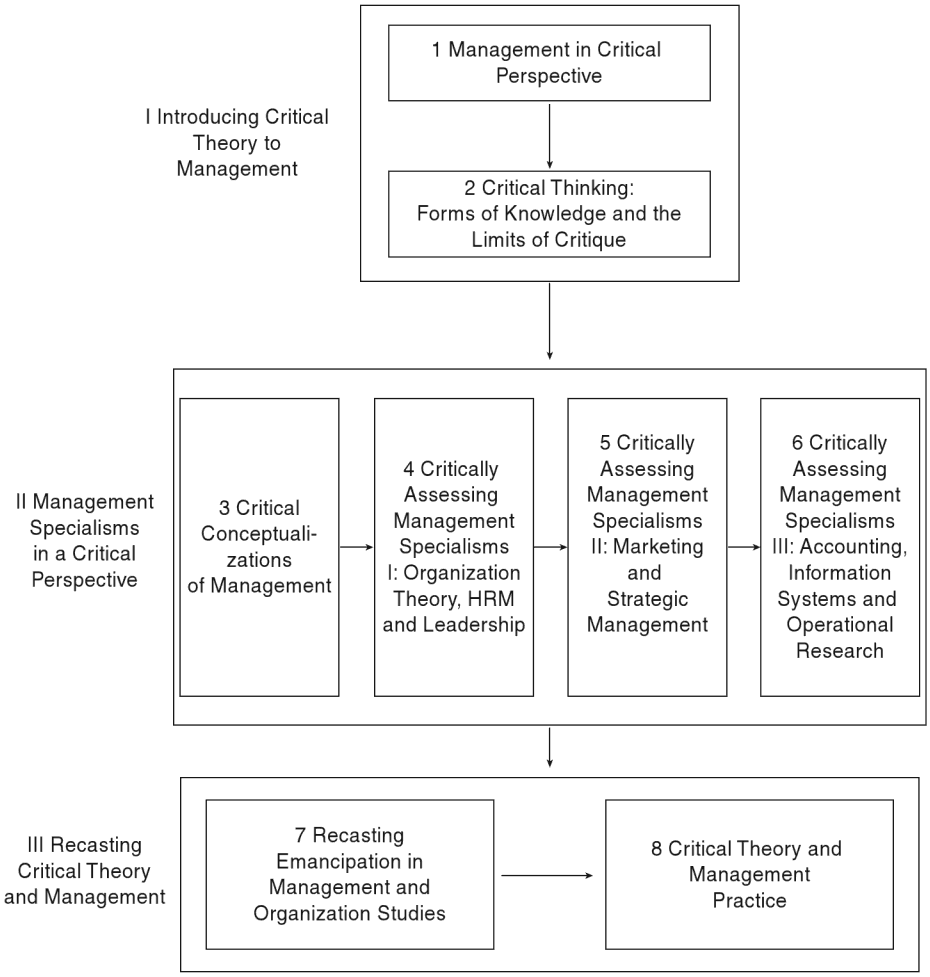

Figure i.1 *Overview of chapters*

Overall, then, the chapters are structured in a way that allows our approach to be introduced and elaborated in Chapters 1–2, then illustrated in Chapters 3–6 and finally reflected upon and developed in Chapters 7–8 (see Figure i.l).

To benefit from this structure, the book is probably best read in chapter order. Nonetheless, we anticipate that some, perhaps most, readers will prefer to look first at sections that are of most immediate interest to them. As we anticipate a readership with varied backgrounds, knowledge and concerns, we have written the book in a way that makes it possible to read each chapter without reference to the others. To assist non-linear readings, we have provided many cross-references to indicate where related arguments are expanded, and we have resisted the temptation to remove minor repetitions.

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This book steers away from recycling the clichés and recipes found in most textbooks that have been prepared for management students and in handbooks written for practising managers. We would like the book to be read by practitioners as well as by students; and it is not just the hope of royalty cheques that stimulates this desire! We firmly believe that forms of analysis developed within the critical traditions of social theory are actually more pertinent and insightful for making sense of the everyday tensions, irrationalities and dilemmas encountered by practising managers than are the tired ideas and superficial prescriptions contained in most management textbooks and guru handbooks.

Unlike most management texts, we make no promises of recipes for the solution of everyday managerial problems, or even that the contents will directly advance the reader's managerial career (though it is by no means incompatible with such an outcome). Rather, our hope is that the book will contribute to the development of less superficial and destructive forms of management theory and organizational practice. Through processes of critical reflection and discussion, we believe that ways can be found, individually and collectively, to identify and reduce the needless waste and divisiveness in modern organizations over which mainstream theory and practice of management so unapologetically presides.

Note

1 To this end, higher education is a 'must' for a growing proportion of the population, responding to a labour market in which a degree is, apparently, a necessity for anything but a 'dead end' job. The rapid expansion of management education and the explosion of business schools are symptomatic of this development, although many of its graduates now find themselves without a job or doing work (e.g. in call centres) for which a degree is largely irrelevant.

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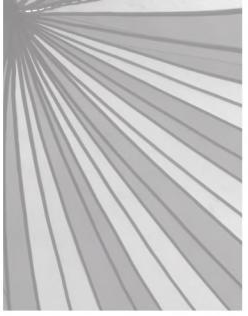

PART I

INTRODUCING CRITICAL THEORY TO MANAGEMENT

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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 financializaton 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,

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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.[1]

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 'baled 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-legitimating 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

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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

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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.

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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.[2] 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

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Critical Theory and Modern Society

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

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

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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

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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 dicussed 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

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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[3]. 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,

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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.

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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

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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'.[5] 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

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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

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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

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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.[6] 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

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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.[7] 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

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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.[8] 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:

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> 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

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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*

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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.[9]

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

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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 unrenewable 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[10] 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;

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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.

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

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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.

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2

Critical Thinking

Forms of Knowledge and the Limits of Critique

The development of modern Western societies has been shaped by two dominating powers: capitalism and science. A critical basis for analysing capitalism was established by Marx. His analysis included some reflections upon the historical potency of scientific thinking for capitalist development but it was largely restricted to an appreciation of its applications in industrializing the labour process, and thereby securing the subsumption of labour under pressures for accumulation. Comparatively overlooked or taken for granted by Marx was the revolutionary but *equivocal* role of scientific thinking in 'modernizing' the world by debunking received wisdoms and dismissing knowledge claims that could not be empirically proven as normative or 'ideological'. The power and equivocality of science was addressed more directly by the other colossus of social theory, Max Weber.

This chapter explores the relationship between knowledge, values and power. At its centre are the questions of what counts as scientific knowledge and what are the limits of its authority. We are concerned with such questions because, in modern societies, science has become established as the dominant source of authoritative knowledge. Science also promotes the view that objective, value-free knowledge is attainable. This understanding, which is as dangerous as it is questionable, underpins the technocratic thinking that lends a spurious credibility to managerial expertise, as discussed in Chapter 1. In effect, the aura of science is invoked, more or less explicitly, to inhibit or suppress debate about the value of particular ends as well as the values incorporated in the claimed rationality of the means.

The idea of value-free knowledge deflects attention from how, in practice, what counts as 'scientific knowledge' is the product of value judgments that are conditioned by specific historical and cultural contexts. Whatever grandiose claims may be made for science, its knowledge remains a contingent product of the particular values that give it meaning and direction. It is for this reason that it makes little sense to counterpose 'science' to 'ideology' – as if it were possible to generate impartial, non-ideological knowledge about an independently given world. Instead, the term ideology is more appropriately applied to knowledge that makes (inflated) claims to be neutral, acontextual, 'incontrovertible', etc.

We begin by considering the view that social science is, or should be, value-free. We believe that criticizing this view is important because it continues to have a

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seductive yet perilous appeal, and not least among management academics who, since the publication of Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911), have endeavoured to revise his thinking rather than contest its scientific aspirations. An appreciation of the principled but ultimately misguided advocacy of value-free science, notably by Max Weber, is, we believe, helpful in illuminating key issues and problems that bedevil claims to produce objective knowledge. *Challenging the idea of value-free science is of crucial importance to critical studies of management because, in the absence of this challenge, critical science is dismissed as normative, value-laden ideology.* In place of this binary division, we commend an understanding of how different value-commitments, analysed in terms of contrasting combinations of assumptions about science and society, are productive of different forms of knowledge. To illuminate this stance, we draw upon the influential paradigm framework developed by Burrell and Morgan (1979). We commend their relativization of a single, positivist/functionalist 'paradigm' of organization science but we reject their claim that knowledge can be neatly divided into four watertight, 'incommensurable' paradigms. Instead, we advocate a modified version of Habermas' (1972) theory of cognitive interests. We conclude the chapter by surveying some themes and issues that are central to critical theorizing.

The Limits of Scientific Knowledge

There is a widely held belief that science, including management science, can produce objective knowledge by removing all 'subjective bias' and forms of interference from 'non-rational' cultural ideas. When armed with the objective facts, there is a rational and therefore legitimate basis for organizing and managing people in accordance with scientific, rather than arbitrary or partisan, principles. That Taylor (1911) dubbed his principles of work organization 'scientific' was no accident; he fervently believed that he had identified universally valid principles for eliminating the irrationality of custom and practice from processes of production and methods of management.[1] Many contemporary followers of Taylor (e.g. Hammer and Champy, 1993), called 'McDonaldizers' by Ritzer (1996), have sought to refine his technocratic vision – often by incorporating more sophisticated theories of human motivation and group dynamics – without doubting the wisdom or coherence of the impulse to perfect the scientific control of human productivity.

The use of scientific thinking to promote and legitimize all kinds of 'dehumanizing', divisive and destructive social technologies has prompted critics of such technocratic reasoning to question its presuppositions and effects. The very idea that management can be made scientific – extolled in the notion of 'management science' – arouses anxiety about how scientific knowledge could be (mis)used, by being invoked to 'prove' the objective superiority of particular values and their associated programmes, Taylor's Scientific Management being a case in point.

That said, advocates of science may themselves be ambivalent about its powers. Notably, Weber celebrates science as a powerful, positive force for dispelling myths and prejudices. Its revelations are understood to strip away preconceptions and prejudices to expose what, for Weber, are the unvarnished facts. By drawing upon

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issue, he insisted that a sharp division exists between values and facts. As we have noted, he argued that scientific facts could *inform* the process of making value-judgments but these facts could not legitimately *prove* or *justify* those value-judgments as this required an (irrational) leap of faith (Weber, 1949: 55). For Weber, Scientific Method can determine the facts; but any amount of facts cannot, in themselves, disprove a value-judgment. The separation of facts and values, Weber believed, or at least hoped, would allow scientific knowledge to progress unhindered by value-judgments. It would also protect science from criticism arising from the potential misuse of scientific knowledge to support particular values. What sense are we to make of Weber's ideas about the possibility of value-free knowledge? Can they withstand critical scrutiny?

We noted earlier how, for Weber, the choice and constitution of the topic of scientific investigation is 'coloured by our value-conditioned interest' (Weber, 1949: 76). What Weber does not appreciate or address, however, is how the very commitment of science to objectivity is necessarily *refracted through diverse sets of value-commitments* – that is, commitments forged within social and political processes that produce *different forms* of 'scientific knowledge'. His argument for value-free science *assumes* a unitary view of science as it fails to recognize that *different value standpoints promote their own distinctive conceptions of science* (Knorr-Cetina, 1999). Of course, Weber acknowledges that the selection of a specific *topic* to investigate depends upon a value-standpoint that renders the topic relevant. Evaluative ideas enable scientists to identify their objects of enquiry *but*, in Weber's conception of science, the particular *value-standpoint(s) of science* is not problematized. For Weber, the choice is either to embrace the specific value-standpoint that renders the production of science meaningful or to become committed to some other value-standpoint. When embracing the specific value-standpoint of science, all the scientist can do is to generate (ostensibly) value-free, factual knowledge of some aspect of the world while avoiding any temptation to invoke scientific knowledge to support or challenge any other, pre-scientific or extra-scientific value-commitment.

Weber's advocacy of the value-free principle is important insofar as it helps counter the irrational, modernist tendency to justify and realize particular value-commitments, including management knowledge, by reference to the (seemingly incontrovertible) authority of science. More positively, by supporting each individual's pursuit of valued ends, the value-free principle can contribute to the development of a more rational society by paying attention to the particular value-commitment of science so that it does not become a universal (technocratic) benchmark of rationality. On the other hand, critics of the Weberian, value-free position have argued that the separation between 'science' and 'morality', or between 'is' and 'ought', is unconvincing. As Giddens (1989: 291–2) has observed:

> I do not see how it would be possible to maintain the division between 'is' and 'ought' presumed by Weber ... Whenever we look at any actual debates concerning social issues and related observations, we find *networks of factual and evaluative judgments, organised through argumentation* (emphasis added).

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Critical thinking challenges the Weberian claim that the realms of science (facts) and values (judgments) are, in reality, ever separate or separable. For this claim is seen to ignore or deny the practical embeddedness of science within particular (e.g. anthropocentric or ecocentric) assumptions. Those persuaded by this claim are seen to be prisoners of an illusion of 'pure theory' (to be discussed below).[2]

Amongst those who stress the inescapable value-ladenness of science are commentators who argue that the adequacy of scientific claims should be judged in terms of their contribution to the (dynamic) project of overcoming socially unnecessary suffering through critique, and not in terms of their (static) reflection of social realities or even the rational reconstruction of them (see Chapter 1). The abuse of science to which Weber points is regarded as inevitable when science is disconnected from the critical task of establishing a good society rather than the application of science in support of the status quo. The emancipatory impulse of critical reflection is not to create or refine scientific knowledge of the world *per se* but, rather, to challenge and transform relationships that foster and pressure forms of ignorance and sustain socially unnecessary suffering.

Science and Critical Theory

A perverse consequence of the doctrine of value-freedom – dubbed by Gouldner (1973b: 63) a 'salvational myth' – has been its succouring of an ideology of *scientism* in which particular knowledge claims produced by Scientific Method are represented as indisputably authoritative. Instead of leaving a space for critical reflection, as Weber intended, scientism inhibits and counteracts processes of self-clarification and the development of responsibility. Where science is equated with value-free knowledge, all other forms of knowledge are obliged to comply with its protocols or become marginalized as unscientific. As Habermas (1974: 264) wryly observes, when 'science attains a monopoly in the guidance of rational action, then all competing claims to a scientific orientation for action must be rejected'. A similar assessment, more colourfully expressed, is made by Collins and Pinch (1998:152) who characterize such 'scientism' as a form of fundamentalism which is defended by 'warriors' who 'seem to think of science as like a fundamentalist religion: mysterious, revealed, hierarchical, exhaustive, exclusive, omnipotent and infallible'.

Critical thinking challenges scientism by attending to how all forms of knowledge are conditioned by relations of power and domination. Notably, Critical Theory (**CT**), as developed by members of the Frankfurt School (to be considered below) emphasizes the possibility of mobilizing human reason to interrogate the authority of scientific knowledge, and not merely to extend or perfect its generation. CT directly presupposes and champions the possibility of a *critical science* that addresses and strives to promote the *rationality of ends* as well as the rationality of means. Whereas the value-free conception of science is preoccupied with refining its methodology for discovering the 'truth' about some portion of reality, CT is concerned with showing how scientific representations of Reality and Truth are conditioned

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and coloured by the social relations through which truth claims are articulated and accepted – a concern that is paralleled in Foucauldian (1977, 1980) considerations of power/knowledge. Only by transforming these relations, CT argues, is it possible to develop less partial or dogmatic representations of reality – a shift in understanding that can itself create important conditions for social change.

The doctrine of value-free knowledge is an example of what Habermas (1972) terms 'the illusion of pure theory' to which we referred earlier. It exemplifies a belief that perfect, historical, disembodied knowledge can be produced by imperfect, historical, embodied (human) beings. When dazzled by this illusion, it is assumed that (scientific) knowledge can be separated from the politics that impel its production. Belief in this separation of 'facts' from values and interests is, for CT, symptomatic of a forgetfulness of the depth of connection between the production of knowledge and practical, human problems. Distinctively human problems arise from the self-consciousness and self-determination that accompany the 'cultural break with nature' (ibid.: 312); and these problems cannot be suspended even, and perhaps especially, when engaging in scientific activity. For CT, the challenge for science is not to perfect Method that will produce precise empirical description and explanation but, rather, to (marshal and) advance thinking in a manner and direction that contribute to emancipatory change. We now elaborate this understanding.

Three Types of Knowledge

The conception of social science commended by Weber is challenged by Habermas (1972) who connects the production of knowledge to the problems endemic to human beings' distinctive relationship to nature and their (cognitive) interests in addressing problems thrown up by this relationship (see also Willmott, 2003). Human beings are uniquely faced with the challenge of coming to terms with the exceptional openness of their relationship to nature – that is, the *cultural* break with nature. In the process, the production of three basic kinds of knowledge is stimulated. First, there is a *technical* (cognitive) *interest* in gaining greater *prediction and control* over unruly natural and social forces. Guided by this interest, diverse kinds of scientific disciplines and associated technologies have been developed to calculate and master elements of the natural world, including the behaviour of human beings. This type of science, which Habermas characterizes as *empirical–analytic* is manifest, for example, in studies that identify the variables (e.g. motivation, training) that may enable line managers to render employee productivity more predictable and controllable.

The second type of knowledge arises from a human interest in *understanding and communicating with each other.* The purpose of such communication, Habermas contends, is not simply to improve our capacities to predict and control the natural and social worlds (that is, the knowledge prompted by the first cognitive interest) but to develop a fuller understanding of the lifeworlds of other people. This, Habermas maintains, is a scientifically coherent and defensible project in itself: in the form of *historical–hermeneutic sciences*, this cognitive interest is directed at enhancing *mutual understanding.* It seeks, for example, to enrich our appreciation of what organizational

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work means to different groups of people, thereby improving our comprehension of their world and enabling and enriching our communications with them. In the field of management, knowledge generated by this interest moves beyond a technical interest in, say, the identification of variables believed to condition human behaviour (e.g. employee productivity or brand loyalty). Historical–hermeneutic science seeks to better appreciate what people think and how they feel about, say, their treatment as producers of goods and of services, irrespective of what instrumental use may be made of such knowledge.

The in-depth appreciation and understanding of others' social worlds, such as that provided by Kunda (1992) in his study of 'Tech' (see Chapter 1), can be illuminating and even enlightening. But it may also leave unconsidered and unchallenged the historical and political forces which shape and sustain these worlds. Attentiveness to the exercise of power in the construction and representation of reality is the province of *critically reflective* knowledge which, Habermas argues, is motivated by a third *emancipatory* (cognitive) *interest*. The distinguishing feature of this interest resides in a concern to expose socially unnecessary forms of suffering occasioned by needless domination and exploitation. For example, it addresses connections between experiences of frustration and the existence of patriarchal practices and institutions – practices that can, in principle, be transformed through emancipatory actions, as demonstrated by the suffragettes and feminist activists. *Critical science* discloses such connections by *reconstructing* the processes through which 'relations of dependence' become 'ideologically frozen' (Habermas, 1972: 310) or normalized. Arguing for critical science, in contrast to a hermeneutical concern to provide an illuminating and persuasive account of the field of study, Deetz (1993) observes that:

> The quality of research from a critical theory standpoint is not based on the ability to tell a good tale but on the ability to participate in a human struggle – a struggle that is not always vicious or visible but a struggle that is always present ... [and is rooted] in the right to participate in the construction of meanings that affect our lives. (p. 227)

Critical science is concerned to understand how practices and institutions of management, which include the production and application of all three of Habermas' types of science, are developed and legitimized within relations of power and domination (e.g. capitalism, patriarchy) that, potentially, can be transformed. This concern differentiates critical science from studies which assume that established relations of power and authority are prefiguratively rational, albeit that, as yet, they are imperfectly so (see Chapter 1). Whereas the mission of empirical–analytic research is to produce knowledge of the reality of management so that a more efficient and effective allocation of resources can be achieved without necessitating a radical transformation of the status quo, critical analysis subjects the rationality of such objectives to scrutiny, arguing that conventional management theory and practice act as a 'servant of power' (Baritz, 1960; see also Brief, 2000) insofar as it takes for granted and (pre) serves the prevailing structure of power relations. By default if not by design, much management theory is wedded to values preoccupied with reproducing or refining

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the status quo, to the detriment of advancing a society in which socially unnecessary forms of domination are targeted and progressively eliminated. To the extent that critical analysis provides insights that provoke and facilitate emancipatory personal and social change, it exemplifies critique. This book aspires to make a contribution to this project.

An Illustration from Identity Research in Organization Studies

Before moving on, we will briefly illustrate Habermas' model of forms of knowledge. Almost any area from management studies could be chosen but the study of identity has attracted considerable interest since the early 1980s (Knights and Willmott, 1985) and has steadily increased during the intervening decades (Alvesson, 2010; Ybema et al., 2009).

The technical interest dominates studies of identity and identification in management and organization research, but to a lesser degree than is common as there is significant representation of interpretive and critical studies in the area. Studies taking a technical cognitive interest explore how identity and identification may be key to a variety of managerial outcomes and thus provide the means of improving organizational effectiveness. Consider, for example, the assumption that 'self-categorization processes are a critical mediator between organizational contexts and organizational behaviour' (Haslam, 2004: 38). By acting upon this intervening variable, it is predicted that particular valued outcomes in terms of efficiency gains, for example, can be facilitated. More generally, much organizational identification research maintains that identification levels affect decision making and behaviour, stereotypical perceptions of self and other, group cohesion (Ashforth and Mael, 1989), and social support (Haslam and Reicher, 2006).

Interpretivist scholarship, associated with Habermas' (1972) second cognitive interest, the 'historical–hermeneutic', seeks enhanced understanding of human cultural experiences, or how we communicate to generate and transform meaning. Contrasted with the technical interest and associated studies, there is little direct concern for the instrumental utility of such knowledge for enhancing organizational performance. Historical–hermeneutic studies focus on how people craft their identities through interaction, or how they weave 'narratives of self' in concert with others, and out of the diverse contextual resources. For researchers guided by this cognitive interest, identity is important for better understanding the complex, unfolding and dynamic relationship between self, work and organization. Typically, studies guided by this interest explore how managers struggle to make sense of themselves and their organizational realities in an ambiguous, often conflict-ridden world (e.g. Beech, 2008; Clarke et al., 2009; Watson, 2008; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003).

Finally, studies guided by Habermas' third, emancipatory cognitive, interest focus on relations of power and domination. Their concern is to illuminate how workers or managers struggle against oppressive forces that restrict or compromise their autonomy and/or impede their capacity to organize collectively to overcome deadlocks (Willmott, 2011a) and repressive relations that tend to constrain agency.

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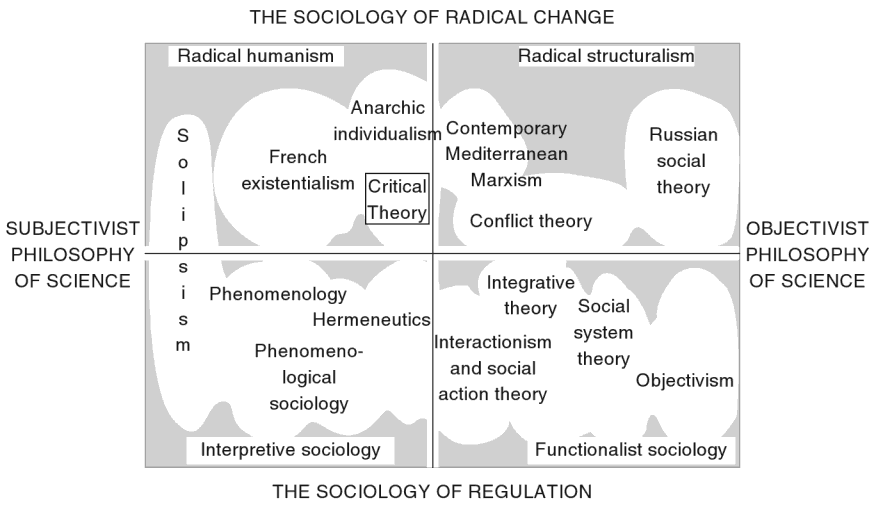

Figure 2.1 *The four sociological paradigms (adapted from Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 29)*

nature, whose properties remain constant for all practical purposes, the social world is understood, from a subjectivist standpoint, to be continuously constructed, reproduced and transformed through intersubjective processes of communication. It is these processes alone that sustain the sense of reality. It is only by being attentive to the meanings through which reality is rendered 'objectively' real to its members, subscribers to a subjectivist philosophy of science contend, that an adequate appreciation of the social world can be developed. Typically, the methodology favoured by 'subjectivist' researchers requires a close involvement with those who are being researched in order to discover how the meanings of concepts – such as 'centralization' – are actually formulated and interpreted by different members of an organization, and how this meaning is negotiated and changed over time.

Turning to consider the vertical dimension of the Burrell and Morgan matrix, theories of social regulation are divided from theories of radical change. *Theories of regulation* assume that modern societies and their organizations are defined more by order than by conflict. Order in organizations and society is interpreted as evidence of a fundamental equilibrium and consensus among their members. Conversely, disorder is interpreted as a temporary imbalance and a necessary means of re-establishing equilibrium. Attention is concentrated upon the issue of how cohesiveness and functional adaptation is accomplished and sustained. Since social order is deemed to be the outcome of an unconstrained accord between the constituents of organizations and society, the focus is upon how mechanisms for preserving social order can be strengthened.

Theories of radical change, in contrast, assume that social relations are conditioned more by contradictory pressures for transformation than by forces of continuity

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and integration. Evidence of consensus is associated with forms of social domination that establish order and 'consensus' through direct repression or, in liberal democracies, through a repressive form of tolerance in which dissenting voices are at once accommodated and marginalized. The appearance of order and stability is then connected with, for example, processes of mass subordination to the individualizing disciplines of market relations (e.g. economic dependence) and/or insidious kinds of socialization (e.g. technocratic indoctrination through education and the mass media).

From this 'radical change' perspective on people and organizations, the reproduction (and transformation) of prevailing institutions and routines are understood to depend upon, and be potentially blown apart by, the contradictory effects of deep-seated, institutionalized inequalities and injustices. What may appear to be natural or inevitable forms of authority (e.g. patriarchy) and timeless sources of meaning (e.g. chauvinism) can, at moments of crisis, become problematical and untenable; and efforts to restore their authority may, perversely, accelerate their decline and demise. When diverse sources of tension combine, and prove resistant to suppression or accommodation, major expressions of rebellion and radical change can occur – such as the widespread disaffection amongst students and workers in Western Europe in 1968, the liberation of Central Europe during the latter half of 1989 and the 'Arab Spring' of 2011.[4]

Four Paradigms for Analysing Management

So far we have identified two contrasting conceptions of social science and two divergent ways of making sense of society. By combining subjective/objective philosophies of science and regulation/radical change theories of society, four paradigms of analysis are identified. We briefly outline the two 'regulation' paradigms – functionalism and interpretivism – before paying more detailed attention to radical structuralism and radical humanism as the latter are more directly connected to critical thinking.

The Functionalist and Interpretivist Paradigms

The *functionalist paradigm* combines an objectivist philosophy of science with a regulation theory of society. Burrell and Morgan identify this as the dominant paradigm in the social sciences and comment that it tends to be 'highly pragmatic in orientation ... problem-oriented in approach ... [and] ... firmly committed to a philosophy of social engineering as a basis of social change' (1979: 26). In Chapter 1, we echoed this view when we noted how knowledge based upon functionalist assumptions has dominated management textbooks and is deeply engrained in the curricula of business schools. It is also probably fair to say that much of the knowledge production and dissemination undertaken within this paradigm pays little attention to Weber's concerns about the use/abuse of science.

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The *interpretive paradigm* studies symbols (e.g. words, gestures) used to render social worlds meaningful. Conceiving of organizational realities as 'little more than a network of assumptions and intersubjectively shared meanings' (ibid.: 29–31), this paradigm departs markedly from the functionalist treatment of social realities as comprising measurable elements or variables. Disillusionment with the capacity of 'hard', functionalist analysis to get to grips with the complexity and slipperiness of forms of organizational work has stimulated the growth of managerialized versions of interpretivism. At the same time, hardnosed functionalism has been joined, but not superseded by, softer, qualitative forms of neo-functionalist analysis. This quasi-interparadigmatic fusion of functionalist and interpretivist analysis is assisted by a shared reliance upon a regulation theory of society. It is most clearly evident in an inclination to abstract the examination of processes of intersubjective meaning construction from consideration of the relations of power and domination through which, arguably, meanings are socially generated and legitimized. To acknowledge and analyse these relations, it is necessary to turn from paradigms of regulation to the paradigms of radical change.

The Radical Structuralist Paradigm

The *radical structuralist paradigm* is distinguished by its combination of an objectivist philosophy of social science with a radical change theory of society. Organizational behaviour is understood to be conditioned, if not determined, by structures of domination – such as the institutionalized exploitation of labour within the capitalist mode of production. Fundamental to the radical structuralist paradigm is the understanding that what individuals think and do is conditioned more by the operation of structural forces than by their own consciousness or intentionality. As Burrell and Morgan (1979: 378) put it, from a radical structuralist perspective 'the system as a whole retains an undiminished elementality – that is, men [*sic*] may seek to understand it but, like the wind or tides, it remains beyond their control', an assessment that resonates with the objectivism of functionalism. Where radical structuralism departs from functionalism is in its assumption that there are fundamental contradictions in social relations which render their social reproduction unstable. These contradictions are understood to account for the existence of more or less overtly coercive or insidious institutions (e.g. secret police, compulsory state education, mass media) that ensure the continuity of social order. The structural contradictions, it is claimed, also account for the eruption of recurrent conflicts and tensions in organizations and society and contain a potential for radical change that is released whenever prevailing institutional structures are found wanting in their regulation of instability.

Radical structuralists of a Marxism persuasion identify a basic contradiction between the organization of work within capitalist enterprises (socialized production of goods and services) and the appropriation by shareholders of the surpluses produced by employees' labour (private accumulation of wealth). This contradiction, when not effectively massaged by the welfare state, has the potential to erupt in industrial conflict and public disorder. Efforts to contain such contradictions in one area (e.g. fiscal

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contraction to balance the budget or curb inflationary wage demands, resulting in mass unemployment) are understood to generate increased tensions in related spheres (e.g. fiscal crises arising from a fall in taxation revenues and added expenditure on benefits without the anticipated stimulus to growth required to generate increased taxation receipts). To secure the appearance of order, repressive measures (e.g. reduction in civil liberties, greater powers given to judiciary and police, the installation of technocrats in place of politicians, etc.) may be applied. Such interventions may be effective in re-establishing order in the short term but at the risk of (further) undermining the legitimacy of the capitalist state. From a radical structuralist standpoint, then, the roots of problems and disorder – as manifested in economic, financial and ecological crises, widespread psychological distress, degraded work conditions, poor housing, juvenile delinquency, etc. – lie in the contradictory structures of capitalism. These problems may be moderated through reform. But they can be resolved only through a radical and revolutionary transformation of the capitalist system – a transformation which is propelled principally by systemic contradictions rather than by the efforts of people, either individually or collectively, to hasten its (inevitable) arrival.

Within the field of management and organization studies, Braverman's (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital* has been a major source of inspiration for the development of radical structuralist analyses of management and organization. Reviving and updating Marxian labour process analysis, Braverman directly challenged the claims of conventional accounts of work organization and employee consciousness, arguing that findings of studies concerned with job satisfaction, for example, pay minimal attention to how worker expectations are conditioned by wider structural factors. The finding that most workers report that they are 'satisfied' with their jobs, radical structuralists contend, tells us more about how employee expectations have been shaped to accommodate and cope with (deskilled) work than about their degraded experience of employment.

The Radical Humanist Paradigm

In the *radical humanist paradigm*, a subjectivist philosophy of science is combined with a radical change theory of society. In common with radical structuralism, the radical humanist paradigm understands social order to be a product of coercion, rather than consent. But its focus is upon contradictions within consciousness and their control through ideological means of manipulation and persuasion, rather than contradictions within the structures of (capitalist) society:

> One of the most basic notions underlying the [radical humanist] paradigm is that the consciousness of man [sic] is dominated by the ideological superstructures with which he interacts, and that these drive a cognitive wedge between himself and his true consciousness. ... The major concern for theorists approaching the human predicament in these terms is with release from the constraints which existing social arrangements place upon human development. (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 32, emphasis omitted)

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Critical Theory (CT), exemplified in the writings of Horkheimer, Benjamin and Marcuse as well as Habermas, has probably been the most influential of the several approaches located by Burrell and Morgan in the radical humanist paradigm. Bracketed together with the work of other neo-Marxist traditions, such as those associated with Lukacs (1971) and Gramsci (1971), Burrell and Morgan position the contribution of CT 'in the least subjectivist region of the radical humanist paradigm' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 283).[5] In contrast to the unmediated materialism of the radical structuralist paradigm, CT takes greater account of *the role of ideas* in the formation and reproduction of consciousness and society. For the radical humanist, the potential for radical change resides in the contradictions between, on the one side, the demands upon consciousness made by dominant (e.g. patriarchal) structures and, on the other side, the capacity of human beings to be creative and self-determining in ways that are fundamentally antagonistic to the reproduction of the status quo.

As the young Marx (1976) argued, the modernizing forces of capitalism exert the contradictory effect of alienating people from each other, from nature and from themselves. Communities are torn apart; industrial work is socially divisive; market relations transform people into commodities; people have limited opportunities for creative and spiritual growth. Through critiques of this kind, radical humanism makes its appeal to *every person* who is *oppressed within, and alienated from, modern institutions*, and not just those who are identified as members of the working class or proletariat. The intent of radical humanist analysis is, first, to raise awareness of how normality is oppressive; and, then, to facilitate the creative and self-determining liberation of individuals from the 'psychic prison' in which they/we are deemed to be incarcerated. Virtually everyone, radical humanists believe, is a victim of systemic oppression – oppression that is so taken for granted that it is routinely viewed as 'life'. Proponents of CT also believe that, when subjected to critical reflection, such experience can spur and inspire opposition to forces of domination.

Within the paradigm of radical humanism, CT is best viewed as a key resource for advancing ideas and practices that share a commitment to the construction of a more rational or, at least, a less irrational society, nationally and globally. Instead of focusing upon the struggle between capital and labour over the control of the labour process and the distribution of surpluses, CT emphasizes the meanings and ideologies through which institutions are established, reproduced and changed. In this respect at least, CT shares with interpretive analysis an appreciation of the central role of meaning in the reproduction of social realities.

Critical Theorists have kept alive the Enlightenment idea that critical reason can be mobilized to transform society, and not just to enhance our knowledge and control of society, or to bolster the authority of an élite. If technology is to enrich rather than impoverish human experience, CT argues, its development and use must be placed under more democratic forms of control. To this end, the values of alternative and intermediate technologies are commended because, quite apart from their ecological benefits, they offer a (decentralized) means of empowering local communities to develop their own solutions and shape their own fate. CT values self-determination

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non-bureaucratic politics' (Held, 1980: 16). Without claiming that their thinking escapes the conditioning of prevailing relations of power, members of the Frankfurt School assume the possibility of subjecting established dogmas to critical scrutiny, and thereby to open up a space for emancipatory change.[6]

Exponents of CT are concerned to remedy the comparative neglect of culture and ideology in critical analysis, without simply making a switch or reversion from Marxian materialism to Hegelian idealism. Orthodox Marxism is criticized for failing to appreciate how forms of culture and communication – in the guise of ideology and the institutionalization of conflict – can serve either to diffuse the potential for dissent or, indeed, may be mobilized for radical transformation. As Habermas has observed with regard to his own shift of focus from production to communication:

> The paradigm-shift ... to communicative action does not mean that I am willing or bound to abandon the material production of the lifeworld as the privileged point of reference for analysis. I continue to explain the selective model of capitalist modernization, and the corresponding pathologies of a one-sided rationalized lifeworld, in terms of a capitalist accumulation process which is largely disconnected from orientations towards use-value. (1985: 96)

This passage underscores the fundamental importance of 'the material production' of the social world. The demands of the capitalist accumulation process, it is suggested, are largely responsible for creating the modern world in which productive activity is directed at the generation of commodities. These commodities have utility principally as a means of exchange, and thus of capital accumulation, rather than being of direct benefit, or 'use-value', for human happiness and development. An adequate understanding of processes of modernization focuses on the 'pathologies of a one-sided rationalized lifeworld'. In turn, this suggests that Critical Theory provides a valuable resource for the development of critical studies of management and organization without adopting it as the sole, or as necessarily always the most fruitful source of critical thinking. This commendation of CT is consistent with the view of Critical Management Studies as a 'broad church' that accommodates diverse traditions of critical scholarship between which there is healthy debate and dissent as well as cross-fertilization (Alvesson et al., 2009).

Some Themes in Critical Theory

A number of themes and issues have been central to Critical Theory and are directly relevant for the study of management and organization. Amongst the most relevant are (a) the dialectics of Enlightenment, (b) the one-dimensionality and consumerism of advanced capitalist societies, (c) the critique of technocracy and (d) communicative action. There are some overlaps between the themes, but it is convenient, for expository purposes, to examine them separately.

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The Dialectics of Enlightenment

At the heart of the Enlightenment project is the critique and replacement of earlier belief systems grounded in tradition, common sense, superstition, religion, etc. with ostensibly more rational forms of thought and practice. However, this project can itself encompass new and emergent forms of dogma, dependence and deprivation – notably, when appeals to science are made to establish and legitimize forms of domination. The paradox of the Enlightenment project – that it produces destruction and oppression as well as liberation and progress – is associated in Critical Theory (CT) with the expansion and domination of a scientistic and technocratic consciousness: consciousness that seeks the development of instrumentally rational means for achieving ends that are deemed (by value-free science) to be beyond rational evaluation.

The rosy, positivist view of science, pictured as the benevolent agent of enlightenment, was forcefully challenged by Horkheimer and Adorno (1947a) in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Modern civilization, they argue, has become progressively mesmerized by the power of a one-sided, instrumental conception of reason. Beguiled by successes in conquering and harnessing nature, people in modern societies are seen to be trapped in a nexus of scientism and technocracy. This nexus, Horkheimer and Adorno contend, is no less constraining, and is in many ways much more destructive, than the myopia of pre-modern traditions which the advance of a modern, scientific civilization aspired to replace: 'In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men [*sic*] from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant' (ibid.: 3). Perhaps the most obvious symptom of this disaster is the relentless effort to dominate nature, associated with the ruthless exploitation of scarce natural resources and widespread environmental destruction, pollution and climate change.[7]

Whenever scientific knowledge fails to appreciate its historical embeddedness within the contexts of its production, CT argues, it stands in danger of *naturalizing* phenomena in ways which *mystify* their emergence out of a dynamic process of struggle between competing and contradictory forces in society. Where the connection of scientific knowledge to an interest in *emancipation* is lost or forgotten, science becomes an ideology: an instrument of political and economic domination. In the form of technocracy, scientific expertise effectively freezes social reality and legitimizes subordination to what currently exists.

When naturalized, social phenomena are represented as existing 'beyond' human powers, rather than as social and political artifacts. From the perspective of CT, the theory and practice of management must be understood in the context of the way beliefs, ideas and values define and legitimize the social category of managers and management. The production of (management) knowledge is seen to be conditioned by relations of power and domination that enable but also constrain our capacity to reflect critically upon established 'truths' – such as our knowledge of people and organizations represented in management studies, and absorbed by its students and practitioners (see Chapter 1). For CT, much scientific and management knowledge is a *one-sided* expression of a dialectical process in which its authority is naturalized, as an appreciation of its historically embedded production is obscured. The dialectical

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imagination of CT, in contrast, strives to expose and critique claims that theories are objective and that management practices are substantively effective. In so doing, CT discloses the limits of established wisdoms and 'best practice(s)', and thereby helps to open up the possibility of more rational, less contradictory, pathways of social and economic development.

One-dimensionality and Consumerism

The term 'one-dimensional man' was coined by Marcuse (1964) to emphasize how a dominant social logic effectively produces people that are mesmerized and subordinated to its mode of operating, lacking capacity and motive to think about alternative ideals and ways of being. Marcuse highlights how the organization of advanced capitalist societies effectively frustrates or deflects the emancipatory impulses of oppositional movements. At the heart of Marcuse's analysis is a critique of consumerism. In affluent Western societies, Marcuse argues, people are enjoined to become passive and unreflective consumers who are incapable of imagining forms of life that differ from the present. The USA, in particular, is identified as a society that possesses enormous productive capacities. Yet, instead of being applied to facilitate qualitative improvement in the lives of its citizens, societal development is driven by the logic – or illogic – of capitalism that, in the name of progress and the American Dream, routinely spreads waste, destruction, superficial satisfaction and needless misery.[8]

Proponents of CT directly challenge the conventional wisdom that mass consumption actually satisfies human needs. Instead of regarding needs as objectively given by human nature, CT understands 'needs' to be shaped by powerful forces (e.g. advertising). They are formed in ways that tie people emotionally, as consumers, to the possession of more and more goods, and thereby increase their material and psychological dependence upon the goods society (see Chapter 3). The depth of this dependence, Marcuse (1969) suggests, is productive of a sense of self that is preoccupied, if not obsessed, with consuming as a way of filling what, in the absence of more fulfilling life-projects, is a vacuum of meaning, and is therefore 'opposed to every change that might interrupt, perhaps even abolish, this dependence' (ibid.: 19). For Marcuse, forms of enjoyment provided by mass consumerism are essentially dehumanizing and repressive. Their principal effect is the numbing of human sensibilities, not their refinement or development.

In a similar vein, Fromm (1955, 1976) has argued that *discriminating* processes of consumption could, and should, form an integral part of a happier and more satisfying life. Yet, perversely, an ever-inflating 'need' for more goods subverts the powers of discrimination, and continuously feeds the consumerist habit. The individual 'consumes' sport, films, newspapers, magazines, books, lectures, natural sceneries, social situations and even other people in the same remote and alienated way that everyday merchandise is consumed. The alienated consumer does not participate actively or appreciatively in these activities, but wants to 'swallow' everything there is. By celebrating the freedom of consumption, the conditioning powers of industry fill and control free time that might otherwise be devoted to contemplation, reflection and communication. Still,

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the mass media are not considered to be irredeemably reactionary or oppressive. If placed under democratic control, rather than being driven by commercial forces that celebrate the values and practices of the status quo, the mass media could be vehicles of education and emancipation. Although an imperfect example, the BBC and similar forms of public service broadcasting demonstrate how a licence fee or sponsorship from subscribers and accountability to the public, rather than to shareholders, can provide a distinctive, comparatively high quality form of broadcasting that incorporates educational and broadly emancipatory values.

The Critique of Technocracy

A distinguishing feature of technocracy is its denial of the relevance of ethics – or moral-practical consciousness (Habermas, 1979: 148) – in processes of individual and societal development. As we argued earlier, the ends of human and organizational existence are taken for granted, are alleged to be self-evident or are deemed to lie beyond rational debate. In the selection of means, ethical considerations are excluded or marginalized as the identification of the best method or procedure is considered to be a purely technical matter. Taylorism exemplifies the technocratic role of experts. Decision making is regarded as the province of managers who, because they are deemed to know best about the field under consideration, can identify the most efficient and/or effective way of achieving (seemingly) given or self-evident ends.[9] To regard these ends as given or beyond rational interrogation and debate is to accept and reproduce the values and priorities of the groups who, through processes of political struggle, have established their ends as *the* ends.

We noted earlier how Weber sought to ward off the technocratic abuse of science by contriving to divide the realm of science (facts) from the realm of values. Habermas, in contrast, differentiates purposive-rational action (oriented towards efficient and effective realization of given ends) from communicative action (oriented towards understanding), *and* argues that the former is always embedded in, and depends upon, the normative framework provided by the latter. As well as providing a basis for his criticisms of Marx's preoccupation with production to the comparative neglect of communication (see above and Habermas, 1974), this assumption guides Habermas' interest in ideas concerned with interaction and the phenomenology of everyday life (Habermas, 1984) that inform his critique of historical materialism:

> I would like to propose the following: the species learns not only in the dimension of technically useful knowledge decisive for the development of productive forces but also in the dimension of moral-practical consciousness decisive for structures of interaction. The rules of communicative action do not develop in reaction to changes in the domain of instrumental and strategic action; but in doing so they follow *their own logic*. (Habermas, 1979: 148, emphasis in original)

Technocracy, Habermas contends, depends and thrives upon a denial, or forgetting, of the embeddedness of instrumental reason in the normative framework of society.

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The more that technocratic consciousness contributes to, and dominates, processes of individual and social development, the more obscured and displaced is the moral-practical quality of *all* human interaction, including the production and application of scientific knowledge. Characterizing technocratic thinking as an ideology, precisely because it masquerades as being above ethics when it is not, Habermas (1971: 105–6) notes how the potency of positivist knowledge of the social world resides in its capacity to 'detach society's self-understanding from the frame of reference of communicative action and from the concepts of symbolic interaction and replace it with a scientific model'. As this occurs, Habermas continues, 'the culturally defined self-understanding of a social lifeworld is replaced by the self-reification of purposive-rational action and adaptive behaviour.'

Habermas draws attention here to the contemporary tendency in the West for the normative framework of society to be supplanted, if not absorbed, by a (technocratic) preoccupation with refining the subsystems of purposive-rational action. 'Old-style' politics, which sought its justification by drawing from an established (classical) pool of ethical ideas about the 'good life', are contrasted with modern politics which have tended to become narrowed into instrumental questions about how to maintain or regenerate elements of the (capitalist) system. In this process, a technocratic focus upon means displaces democratic debate about ends. The traditional approach, Habermas argues, was oriented to 'practical goals ... defined by interaction patterns'. In contrast, the contemporary (technocratic) approach to politics is aimed at the functioning of a manipulated system. Formally democratic institutions exist but, in effect, these operate to permit administrative decisions to be made largely independently of the specific motives of citizens. These institutions provide legitimacy for such decisions. But there is minimal substantive participation by citizens in key decision-making processes. It should therefore come as no surprise that so many citizens in advanced Western societies feel so remote from, and disaffected in relation to, the world of liberal democratic politics – a disaffection that threatens to disrupt the conditions upon which technocratic rule relies.

To counter the degeneration of (bourgeois) democracy and its drift into technocracy, Habermas stresses the importance of distinguishing (practical) communicative from (technical) instrumental rationality, and argues that as much – and more – attention must be devoted to the rationalization of the former, by '*removing restrictions on communication*' (Habermas, 1971: 118, emphasis in original), as has been given to the rationalization of systems of instrumental, purposive-rational action. Otherwise, the prospect is for ethics and democracy to be progressively eroded and eventually to 'disappear behind the interest in the expansion of our power of technical control' (ibid.: 113). Potentially, the corrosive effects of technocratic consciousness can be challenged and reversed by promoting and supporting actions that challenge restrictions and open up communications within all spheres – familial, organizational and public – and thereby facilitate the development of a *democratically rational society*. As Habermas, puts it:

> Public, unrestricted discussion, free from domination, of the suitability and desirability of action-orienting principles and norms in the light of socio-cultural

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> purposive-rational attitude toward calculable amounts of value and makes it possible to exert generalized, strategic influence on the decisions of other participants while *bypassing* processes of consensus-oriented communication. Inasmuch as they do not merely simplify linguistic communication, but *replace* it with a symbolic generalization of rewards and punishments, the lifeworld contexts in which processes of reaching understanding are always embedded are devalued in favor of media-steered interactions; the lifeworld is no longer needed for the coordination of action. (ibid.: 183, emphasis in original)

The effect of coordination by means of systems integration, Habermas argues, is to devalue and weaken the moral order of the lifeworld. Possibilities for improving and enriching the rationality of the lifeworld, opened up by modernist questioning of the authority of tradition, are impeded by efforts to preserve the system – as when, for example, functional rationality feeds off, and colonizes, the meanings and understandings that are developed and valued within everyday life. Lifeworld values are weakened wherever a set of standards determined by experts is imposed upon citizens/customers who are encouraged to substitute those standards for what they have developed within the lifeworld. Individuals then become constituted in passive roles – as employee/consumer/client/citizen/etc. – shaped principally by the technical, instrumental rationality of systems rather than by the practical, communicative rationality of the lifeworld. As one friend of ours expressed it, having moved into a more affluent region where consumerist ideals were more salient: 'Before I had a life, now I have a lifestyle'.

When the institutional framework of the lifeworld is colonized by systems rationality, Habermas contends, there is a process of cultural impoverishment, as diverse experts set standards and package opinions. It is a form of degradation that Habermas (1984: 330) attributes, above all, to '*an elitist splitting-off of expert cultures from contexts of communicative action in everyday life*' (emphasis added). However, as we noted earlier, this process of colonization continuously encounters problems of legitimation: 'money and power can neither buy nor compel solidarity and meaning' (ibid.: 363). Systems rationality can, at best, induce dramaturgical compliance with the administrative norms of the new technocracy in which corporate cultures, for example, are managed by human resource professionals (see Chapter 3 and 4), or where traders and managers in financial institutions become progressively removed and remote from the lifeworlds of those for whom their trades have material consequences. This does not foster the trust and mutual respect, and ultimately undermines the very confidence that is necessary, for systems rationality to be translated into effective forms of cooperation. From this it follows that a major task for critical thinkers is to expose the precarious foundations as well as the oppressive effects of the instrumental rationality of systems. Doing so, it is possible to open a space in which the everyday lifeworld is revalued and rationalized – not by experts or other proponents of systems rationality but, instead, by groups or movements that challenge technocracy and champion democracy in ways that at once demand and support the values of autonomy, responsibility and solidarity.

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Critiques of Critical Theory

To conclude this chapter without some reference to criticisms of Critical Theory would be inconsistent with the latter's critical intent and self-critical claims. Many criticisms could be considered but, for present purposes, we are highly selective. We return to make additional criticisms in Chapter 7. Here we divide our brief review of critiques into those that are 'external' to CT, and therefore challenge its basic assumptions, and those that are basically sympathetic to CT, but identify difficulties with its project.

External Criticisms

To those who regard social phenomena as neutral objects of investigation, equivalent to the objects of the natural sciences, the claims of CT are, of course, hopelessly 'unscientific', value-laden and 'political'. CT is swiftly dismissed as Leftist propaganda, peddled by disaffected intellectuals who lack the sense and/or scientific commitment to recognize the unbridgeable difference between facts and values. In response, Critical Theorists have urged reflection upon the assumptions which support such dogmatic dismissals. Yet, despite an ever-expanding volume of literature that argues against the neutrality and objectivity of social science (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), many people remain indifferent to, or unpersuaded by, powerful arguments that dispute science's value-neutrality. Or, at least, they are willing to defer to the 'scientific expert' not least because they (we) feel unable to take responsibility for decision making. Failure to defer is assumed to precipitate a fall into the abyss of chaos and/or relativism.

Some of those who share CT's scepticism about conventional images of science and society have not, however, been persuaded by its arguments about human autonomy and processes of historical development. Such claims are criticized for failing to grasp how the engine of history operates largely independently of human consciousness (e.g. Braverman, 1974) or, in the modern era, acts to reduce critical consciousness to a cynicism that 'holds anything positive to be fraud' (Sloterdijk, 1980: 546). Alternatively, CT is seen to appeal to notions of autonomy and democracy that lost their meaning or purchase in the context of modern societies, where the credibility of these nineteenth-century ideas has largely drained away (see also Crook et al., 1992). Luhmann (1982), for example, has suggested that the basis of Habermas' distinction between technical and practical rationality is historical, and that its moment has likely passed – a view which, ironically, is not inconsistent with Habermas' own cautionary observation, cited earlier, that 'we have no metaphysical guarantee' (Habermas, 1979: 188) that the contemporary erosion of the lifeworld as a constitutive force will not continue, and even become total.

Alternatively, the outpourings of CT have been interpreted as the work of a disgruntled group of intellectuals whose privileged class background has impeded their identification with the interests of working people and an associated inclination to

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identify almost every group as alienated and, therefore, as potential agents of emancipatory change. Suspicion of the historical and elitist basis of CT has been expressed by Bottomore (1984) who contends that:

> Reading the Frankfurt School texts on the loss of individual autonomy (and especially the writings of Adorno and Horkheimer) it is difficult to escape the impression that they express above all ... the sense of decline in a particular stratum of society, that of the educated upper middle class, or more specifically the 'mandarins', and the nostalgia for a traditional German Kultur. (ibid.: 42–3)

This objection is related to the criticism that Habermas' (re)formulation of CT has been excessively preoccupied with questions of culture and ideology, to the neglect of the material basis of society (see Roderick, 1986). Habermas is censured for a focus upon communication that tends to deflect attention from its conditioning by the dynamics of capitalist reproduction. When responding to such criticism, Habermas has, as we noted earlier, argued that relations of production are significantly shaped and mediated by processes of communication and identity formation that are inadequately appreciated in materialistic analysis (see Habermas, 1987: 332 *et seq.*). Needless to say, this defence cuts little ice with those who identify contradictions within, and struggles over, the productive process as the principal engine of history and of radical social change.

And feminism?

Another criticism directed at CT is its very limited engagement with feminist theory and minimal appreciation of the significance of feminism as a social movement. That all leading Critical Theorists have been men is probably not unrelated to this critique. The neglect of feminism is particularly disappointing in Habermas' case because he has demonstrated such a willingness to debate with so many other strands of critical social theory. In Chapter 3, we make reference to feminist organization theory. Here we outline some central strands of anti-patriarchal thinking to highlight its affinities with central themes of Critical Theory.

Feminists argue that the very structures of modern society are phallocentric and patriarchal; and that change is necessary if women (and men) are to be emancipated from male domination. There are, however, a variety of feminisms (see Calas and Smircich, 2006), some alien, and some much more closely related to CT. *Liberal feminism* tends to share the basic assumptions of functionalism (see earlier discussion of 'the functionalist paradigm') as it concentrates on promoting a narrow set of equal-opportunity issues, such as the careers of female managers. The basic concern is to make better use of the capacities that women can bring to the world of work. The concerns of *radical feminists* go well beyond the demand that women must be able to compete without prejudice for positions presently occupied by men, and must be enabled to do so by the provision of policies and services, such as child care, that allegedly make this possible. In isolation from other more radical demands, such as the equal valuing of the unpaid work in the home that many women presently do,

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the winning of equal opportunities is assessed to do little more than legitimize dominant institutions by making them appear ungendered (Collinson et al., 1990). Since it is principally men who have defined and colonized what is acceptably 'feminine', radical feminists seek to change the institutions within and through which their self-identity is constituted.

These concerns echo and support radical humanist thinking insofar as they are critical of the neglect of 'non-economic' forces in radical structuralist analysis. However, a key issue for radical feminists is the limited and marginalized critique of patriarchal structures of domination in both 'humanist' and 'structuralist' variants of radicalism (Walby, 1986). Without necessarily denying the importance of politico-economic forces and contradictions in the organization of modern societies, radical feminists highlight and question the genderedness of modern institutions. In particular, their critiques have drawn attention to how, in these work organizations, men have occupied positions of social and economic advantage, in terms of status, wealth and influence, relative to women, and have therefore been able to shape and solidify (patriarchal) forms of institutional development. The challenge of radical feminism is very far-reaching: it encompasses all manifestations of gendered practices, and not just the right of access to positions which embody patriarchal values (Martin, 2003). The challenge extends to apparently impersonal and neutral terrain, such as nature (Merchant, 1980), science (Harding, 1986) and the market (Hartsock, 1984).

Perhaps the most extreme – or most pure – form of radical resistance to patriarchy, which ostensibly amounts to a total rejection, is *separatist feminism* in which women undertake to create their own institutions. Participation by men is excluded on the grounds that their involvement renders social relationships violent, subordinating and demeaning. Partly as a reaction to what have been regarded as excesses of separatist feminism (which effectively disregard or deny any active role or responsibility of women in reproducing patriarchal forms of domination), *radical postfeminism* has sought to retrieve and re-value aspects of femininity (e.g. motherhood and a logic of care associated with experiences of nurturing and caretaking) that influential strands of radical feminism have tended to neglect, or interpret as symptomatic of female subordination, reflecting traditional divisions of labour. Radical postfeminists are concerned about the unintended, self-defeating consequences of feminisms that impede, rather than facilitate, communication with other groups who are potentially supportive of the feminist goal of dissolving patriarchal institutions (see Gore, 1992). For example, postfeminists more readily place a positive value upon the sensuality and nurturing quality of femininity, whilst also arguing that such qualities are distorted and exploited within patriarchal societies. In some versions, these qualities are identified with a universalistic conception of 'the feminine' (e.g. Marshall, 1993), albeit one to which both sexes have some degree of access. In other versions of radical postfeminism, what counts as 'feminine' or 'feminine values' has no essence but, instead, is understood to be historically and culturally contingent (Flax, 1990b). The latter position, leaning towards poststructuralism (see below) and its antipathy to fixed categories and seemingly self-evident and stable identities (like 'men' and 'women'), opens a space for addressing issues of gender

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relations in a way that subverts a tendency to regard (and marginalize) 'feminism' as an exclusively women's issue (Flax, 1990a). This stance, which challenges the dualism of masculine/feminine issues, is also more consonant with the Habermasian understanding that different types of knowledge are potentially complementary rather than irremediably incommensurable.

Radical feminism usefully draws attention to a major blind spot in Critical Theory (Fraser, 1987; Meisenhelder, 1989). It highlights the vital importance of understanding patriarchy as a fundamental source of domination; and it identifies the women's movement as an important (yet in CT neglected) source of opposition to oppressive, male-centred values and practices. Postfeminist ideas are potentially of relevance for CT, and especially for Habermas' emphasis upon communication, because they open up awareness of, and communication about, gender-related forms of subjugation. Rather than simply dismissing CT as 'gender blind', it is notable that some postfeminists have drawn upon, and have critically reconstructed, the insights of CT in ways that recognize their mutual concerns and enrich their respective understandings (e.g. Benhabib, 1992; Martin, 2003).

Fraser (1987), for example, reviews and re-works the Habermasian distinction, discussed above, between, on the one hand, 'the lifeworld' – which is closely associated with the domestic and private sphere – and, on the other hand, 'the system' where technical rationality is dominant, and which is identified more closely with the world of work and the public sphere. The distinction between 'lifeworld' and 'system' is found to have '*prima facie* purchase on empirical social reality' (ibid.: 37). At the very least, it acknowledges the common experience of a division existing between the personal sphere (e.g. the family) and the more impersonal realm of economic relations (e.g. paid employment). But, Fraser argues, it is no less important to appreciate how this distinction can obscure the *continuities* between these realms – for example, by masking or marginalizing the extent to which the home is 'a site of labour, albeit unremunerated and often unrecognized', that is largely undertaken by women. If this criticism is accepted, then it is necessary to revise Habermas' analysis in a way that recognizes how the (patriarchal) positioning of men, as heads of family households, is underpinned by their privileged access to money and power, the principal media of the operation of 'the system'. In fact, Habermas does acknowledge the presence and oppressive influence of such media within the sphere of close, interpersonal relations. But, tellingly, these are regarded as a 'colonizing force', not as directly implicated in the constitution of the modern 'lifeworld'. Only in his more recent work is this stance tempered by an acknowledgement of the intertwining of 'system' and 'life-world' elements (see Scherer, 2009). Radical feminists valuably stress the degree of mutual interdependence, interpenetration and male domination of both 'lifeworld' and 'system':

> the struggles and wishes of contemporary women are not adequately clarified by a theory that draws a basic battle line between system and lifeworld institutions. From a feminist perspective, there is a more basic battle line between the forms of male dominance linking 'system' to 'lifeworld' *and us*. (Fraser, 1987: 55, emphasis in original)

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reflection outlined in Chapter 1. There is reflection that operates in the realm of ideas (e.g. about the universal presuppositions of speech and action) which has no *necessary* effect upon broader processes of self-(trans)formation. But there is also reflection that incorporates, but goes beyond, processes of 'rational reconstruction' to dissolve destructive habits of mind and other compulsions that unnecessarily 'restrict patterns of perception and behaviour', and thereby enable 'the subject (to) emancipate himself from himself' (Habermas, 1975: 183). Habermas has less to say on how *reconstruction* is practically translated into *critique*, although his efforts to articulate a theory of deliberative democracy, informed by his 'universal pragmatics' which assume the possibility of reasoned and inclusive public discussion geared to attaining consensual decisions, moves in this direction (see Reed, 1999). Critics have argued that democratic decision making is inherently conflict-ridden and that the idea of reaching an unforced consensus is not only illusory but also damaging of the very pluralism that democracy is committed to respecting and strengthening (Mouffe, 1999b; Edward and Willmott, 2012). This shortcoming relates to another criticism concerning CT's lack of a substitute for the proletariat as the agency of emancipatory social change.

Seeking to learn something from the lessons of modern history, leading advocates of CT have been highly sceptical about the prospects of proletarian revolution without, in most cases, becoming resigned to the prospect of total domination by instrumental reason or becoming wholly sceptical about the possibility of emancipation. As Burrell (1994: 5) observes, Habermas 'stands against all varieties of totalizing critique which lead to despair. For him, the philosopher as "guardian of reason" is also the sentinel of, and for, human hope.' Departing from other, more accessible but arguably cruder forms of critical thinking, Habermas has embraced an abstract and rather hazy idea of gradualist change. For Habermas, change arises from a developing, though uneven, disillusionment with the effects – personal, social and ecological – of modern capitalist society that are increasingly experienced as a destructive disillusionment that finds it positive expression and antidote through the activities and demands of radical social movements. Most recently, however, Habermas seems to have become more doubtful, if not outrightly pessimistic, about the prospects for the emergence of such a cohesive movement for change: 'I suspect that nothing will change in the parameters of public discussion and the decisions of politically empowered actors', he writes, 'without the emergence of a social movement which fosters a complete shift in political mentality.' And he continues, 'The tendencies towards a breakdown in solidarity in everyday life do not render such mobilization within western civil societies exactly probable' (Habermas, 2010: 74). As this book goes to press, there may be the stirring of such a movement in the Occupy Wall Street activism which began in New York's Zuccotti Park and, facilitated by social media, spread rapidly across North America and to many cities around the world (see also endnote 5).

To date, leading proponents of CT have devoted much more attention to the process of rational reconstruction than to the issue of how critical thinking has relevance for, and purchase upon, practical processes of collective self-(trans)formation.

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Management and organizations have also been grossly neglected by leading Critical Theorists (e.g. Habermas, Honneth), a neglect that is symptomatic of a tendency to ignore such institutions, despite their centrality to modernity and systems rationality. Nonetheless, any lingering doubts about the practical, emancipatory relevance and potency of CT should not eclipse an appreciation of its role in raising important issues and providing inspiration for critical reflection. Of course, critical reflection upon established routines and habits of mind may merely fuel paralysing doubts and anxieties, especially in the absence of a supportive culture for addressing and dissolving such concerns. But CT may also stimulate and facilitate greater clarity about, and resistance to, forces that place socially unnecessary constraints upon open communication and personal fulfilment. It is important not to expect or demand too much of CT – CT cannot itself do the practical work of emancipation.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we have considered the central role played by knowledge in society: although intellectual understanding is insufficient to create change, knowledge nevertheless informs and justifies how we act. Whenever knowledge is, for all practical purposes, accepted as truth – when, for example, it is taken for granted that managers make the decisions or that women have 'special orientations and skills' – some forms of action are facilitated as others are impeded. In this sense, knowledge is powerful, especially when it is represented and understood as neutral and authoritative (i.e. scientific). Because knowledge is a potent medium of domination, it is necessarily a focal topic of critical analysis.

In the first part of the chapter, we argued that the idea of one, authoritative value-free science acts to devalue and suppress alternative knowledge and conceptions of science. Burrell and Morgan's (1979) *Paradigms* framework was introduced to demonstrate the heuristic value of highlighting the presence of different approaches to the production of knowledge about organizations and management. Their framework also enabled us to locate Critical Theory in the wider terrain of social scientific enquiry. A limitation of Burrell and Morgan's framework is that the production of knowledge is abstracted from its motivation, and Habermas' theory of cognitive interests was commended as a means of correcting this omission. Habermas' formulation of three cognitive interests shows, and encourages, the development of different kinds of science, including the empirical–analytic knowledge generated with Burrell and Morgan's functionalist paradigm, but *within* a broader critical vision of science as a potentially emancipatory force.

From the standpoint of Critical Theory, the central problem in making sense of social reality, including the theory and practice of management, is *not* how to cleanse the scientific method of normative bias but, rather, how to formulate and address *the kind* of normative commitment which should inform the production of knowledge. CT contends that the identification and pursuit of means and ends

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can be more or less rational, depending upon the openness and symmetry of the power relations through which decisions about ends are reached. Accordingly, the development of less distorted forms of knowledge and communication, which is a precondition for the fuller democratization of modern institutions, is understood to be conditional upon removing institutional and psychological obstacles to achieving greater openness and symmetry.

In seeking to illuminate the focus and scope of critical thinking and to illustrate this by reference to Critical Theory, we have indicated its relevance for critiquing aspects of management and organizations within advanced capitalist societies. CT's attention to consumerism and the influence of mass media, for example, is relevant for analysing marketing as a specialism of management (see Chapter 5); and CT's critique of technocracy and instrumental reason is widely applicable to the contents of management disciplines which are refined and applied for purposes of buttressing instrumental reason or revitalizing the status quo (see Chapters 3–6).

In conclusion, it is worth noting how advocates of CT, and Habermas in particular, have addressed abstract theory and to some extent general political and broader social issues without considering in any detail specific social institutions and practices, such as management and organization. It would therefore seem highly appropriate to complement the theoretical emphasis of Critical Theory with a more direct focus upon the (technocratic) domain of management and organization where, arguably, the media of money and power are most intensively engaged and where system and lifeworld meet and clash.

Notes

1 Whereas established management practice relied upon the vagaries of 'custom and practice', Taylor's scientific principles claimed to articulate the rational specification of managerial and worker behaviour. Taylor took it for granted that everyone has a broadly equal stake in rationalizing productive activity – managers and workers as well as shareholders – and would therefore each accept his principles of organization. Quite apart from the resistance of shopfloor workers who resented the loss of control over the pace and variety of their work, Taylor failed to grasp that managers – the experts – would not be unequivocally unenthusiastic about the additional burden of responsibility that his system placed upon them. Although the realization of his technocratic vision was found to be flawed by its unrealistic assumptions, Taylor's ideas did much to cement the ideal of managerial prerogative and control based upon specialist expertise. Subsequent revisions of management theory have rejected his principles without abandoning his technocratic vision.

2 Pure theory, Habermas (1972: 314–5) argues, wants to 'derive everything from itself, succumbs to unacknowledged external conditions and becomes ideological. Only when philosophy discovers in the dialectical course of history the traces of violence that deform repeated attempts at dialogue and recurrently close off

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the path to unconstrained communication does it further the process whose suspension it otherwise legitimated: mankind's evolution toward *Mündigkeit*. *Mündigkeit* can be loosely translated as autonomy and responsibility in the conduct of life.'

3 There have also been criticisms from trade unionists as well as from radicals of both the Left and the Right. Those on the Left have viewed management as agents of capital whose oppressive function is to keep workers in their place. From the Right, management is criticized for building self-serving bureaucratic empires that harbour inefficiency, impede competitiveness and dampen individual initiative.

4 The example of Eastern Europe serves to illustrate how the contradictions of state socialism can be contained through military oppression, routine surveillance and corruption as well as less transparent processes of indoctrination and mystification. The crushing of urban oppositional elements in China in 1989, in Russia during 1995 and 1996, and in Syria in 2011 has illustrated how the use of violence by the state can be sustained and brutally exercised in the face of resistance. The coercive use of the army as well as the police during the Miners' Strike in the UK revealed the iron fist beneath the velvet glove of a modern 'democratic' state. When the Occupy Wall Street protesters were forcefully removed from New York's Zuccotti Park, the media were prevented from witnessing the event. Credentialed members of the media were kept a block away and police helicopters prevented news helicopters from filming the eviction. Many journalists reported being roughly or violently treated (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupy_Wall_Street. Accessed November 17, 2011). As the examples of Eastern Europe indicate, where the coercive grip of totalitarianism is loosened, other, gangster-like forces can emerge to fill the vacuum. In the absence of a well-organized working class, the breakdown of order presents an opportunity for various reactionary ideologies and criminal practices to assert themselves, often with former *apparatchiks* remaining in key positions and/or using these positions to acquire state assets.

5 In this respect, Critical Theory is distanced from other elements of the radical humanist paradigm – such as the traditions of anarchism (e.g. Stirner, 1907) and existentialism (Cooper, 1990) which disregard the historical and material conditions of action. While these philosophies are directly concerned with issues of human freedom, their marginalization of the importance of the historical embeddedness of human experience leads them to become fixated upon what one Critical Theorist has characterized as the self-absorbed jargon of authenticity (Adorno, 1973).

6 For overviews, many of which focus upon the work of Jürgen Habermas, see *inter alia* Jay, 1973; Held, 1980; Friedman, 1981; Honneth, 1991; Kellner, 1989; Rasmussen, 1990; Finlayson, 2005. There are also a number of collections that contain illuminating articles on particular aspects of Critical Theory. See, for example, Thompson and Held, 1982; Wexler, 1991. For a 'purist' critique of our engagement of Critical Theory, see Böhm, 2007.

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7 This instrumentalism is closely related by CT to the exchange principle which assumes that everything is translatable into money, an abstract equivalent of everything else. The measurement and quantification of all phenomena, associated with the demands of capitalism for exchange, forces qualitatively different, non-identical phenomena into the mould of quantitative identity. Through the use of standardized, quantifiable instruments, the distinctive orientations and values of individuals are processed and measured according to an apparently objective set of categories or truths.

8 Marcuse's analysis parallels 'the end of ideology' thesis developed by Daniel Bell (1974) who heralds the era of the 'post-industrial society' in which class antagonisms and systematic crises are extinguished. However, whereas post-industrial theorists, like Bell, simply report and effectively endorse this trend, CT is consistently hostile to this development. The 'problem', from the point of view of CT, is that modern, affluent societies are too successful in 'delivering the goods', at least for the majority of their members. Their very success impedes the development of a critical distance from ruling ideologies of consumerism. If not wholly inconceivable, protest or rejection of dominant values and practices becomes, for most people, irrational.

9 In the popular imagination, this is precisely what science is supposed to do, which helps to explains why science, or the popular idea of it, is so readily associated with successive generations of innovative methods of organization and management that are (or claim to be) more productive.

10 This aspect of Habermas' work is particularly well discussed and critically examined in White (1988, especially Chapters 5 and 6).

11 It might be tempting to suggest that Habermas has an excessively romanticized view of such groups, and fails to fully recognize the constraints upon communication that arise from their own identity-securing concerns in which social pressures to comply with various forms of 'political correctness' and to respect tabooed topics impede open debate. While this is always a danger, a reading of his highly sceptical writings on the student protest movement in the late 1960s offers considerable reassurance (Habermas, 1971, Chapter 2).

12 This task has been facilitated by Habermas' movement away from a philosophy of consciousness towards a philosophy of language. Instead of locating the impulse for emancipation in the alienation of an essential – whether asexual, male or female – human *nature*, the philosophy of language focuses upon how *interactions*, including those that are constitutive of gender relations, are routinely forged within asymmetrical relations of power. For a good overview of various shifts and reformulations within Habermas' thinking, see Finlayson, 2005.

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