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John Dixon, Rhys Dogan,

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A philosophical analysis of management: improving praxis

John Dixon and Rhys Dogan
University of Plymouth, Plymouth, UK

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Abstract *This paper draws on the philosophy of social sciences to develop a framework that permits a critical analysis of management practice. It uses this framework to construct a taxonomy that enables the identification of the competing philosophical paradigms that underpin contending perspectives on what constitutes “good” management practice, so enabling the articulation of their salient risks and thus their fundamental philosophical flaws. It then proposes the requirements for a philosophically coherent approach to management. Thereon, the implications for management development are explicated.*

Introduction

All contending approaches to management have their origins in conflicting and competing values, beliefs and attitudes on what constitutes “good” management practice. These are, in turn, a product of the beliefs held by managers about how the world works and how other people behave. Underpinning these competing world views are competing philosophical predispositions about what constitutes valid knowledge (true beliefs) and what gives rise to human actions. This paper applies a conceptual framework offered by the philosophy of the social sciences to explore the competing philosophical dispositions that give rise to conflicting perceptions on what constitutes “good” management practice. Its objectives are four-fold. The first is to identify the competing philosophical paradigms underpinning contending perspectives on what constitutes “good” management. The second is to articulate the salient risks associated with each of these contending approaches to management, so as to identify their fundamental philosophical flaws. The third is to apply recent developments in the philosophy of the social sciences to establish the methodological foundations of a coherent set of management practices. The final objective is to explicate the implications of this analysis for management development.

A philosophical framework for the analysis of management practice

Managers have selective screens through which they receive knowledge of how the organizational world works and how other people behave in it. These provide the value-oriented means by which they order occurrences so as to give clarity of meaning to what would otherwise be an anarchic stream of events. These selective screens “operate through inclusion and exclusion as homogenizing forces, marshalling heterogeneity into ordered realms,



silencing and excluding other discourses, other voices in the name of universal principles and general goals” (Storey, 1993, p. 159). They have both cognitive-rational (objective meaning) and communicative-rational (normative meaning) dimensions, which intermingle to produce an assumptive world: a “cognitive map of the world out there” (Young, 1979, p. 33). The result is a hierarchically structured set of management beliefs, values and norms that managers construct as a result of their interaction with their internal and external environments, which can be categorized as immutable core values, adaptive attitudes, and changeable opinions (Parsons, 1995, p. 375). How managers interrogate the world, and so build their assumptive world, depends, then, on their epistemological predisposition (their contentions about what is knowable, how it can be known, and the standard by which the truth can be judged) and their ontological predisposition (their contentions about the nature of being, what can and does exist, what their conditions of existence might be, and to what phenomena causal capacity might be ascribed) (Dixon, 2002; Dixon and Dogan, 2002, 2003)[1].

Epistemological dispositions

Epistemological concern about how the world can be known gives rise to the proposition that a person can know a fact only if he/she holds a belief, as a propositional attitude or intentional state, that a factual proposition is true, which, then, when combined with desire or some other mental state, gives rise to behavioral dispositions. However, only some true beliefs (knowledge claims) are knowledge (as distinct from, for example, from lucky guesses). The conversion of a true belief into knowledge requires a criterion or standard by which judgements can be made about what is and is not genuine knowledge. The epistemological debate within the social sciences concerns the relationship between the objective and the subjective. There are two broad epistemological approaches (Hollis, 1994): naturalism (embracing, *inter alia*, empiricism, logical positivism, verificationism and falsificationism) and hermeneutics (embracing, *inter alia*, epistemological hermeneutics, existentialism and transcendental phenomenology).

Naturalism, which grounds social knowledge in material forces, has two key traditions: positivism, which rejects unobservables as knowable and requires an agent ontology; and realism, which accepts unobservables as knowables and permits a structuralist ontology. Naturalism proposes two types of knowledge – the analytic and the synthetic (Hempel, 1966). Analytic statements are derived from deductive logic and can offer a profound and strong demonstration of cause and effect, explanation and prediction. However, they only produce definitive knowledge of mathematical and linguistic relationships. Synthetic statements are derived through inductive inference and offer a weak and contingent correlation of cause and effect (Williams and May, 1996, p. 25). While both address the problem of causality in different ways

(Popper, 2000), naturalism can only offer reasonably reliable predictions, it cannot identify unambiguous causal relationships.

Hermeneutics, in contrast, contends that knowledge rests on interpretations embedded in day-to-day expressions, or forms of life derived from cultural practice, discourse and language (Winch, 1990), and thus uses the distinctive insights of linguistic philosophy to understand the meaning of human conduct. It contends that knowledge is generated by acts of ideation that rest on intersubjectively shared symbols, or typifications that allow for reciprocity of perspectives (Schutz, 1967). However, this requires acts of reflexive interpretation to ensure the appropriate contextualisation of meaning (Blumer, 1969; Garfinkel, 1967). Thus, hermeneutic knowledge is culturally specific, subject to severe relativism, dynamic and thus open to constant revision, which makes explanation contingent on culture, and prediction problematic.

Ontological dispositions

Ontology concerns about the nature of existence or being (Nozick 1981) gives rise to a set of questions: What does and can exist? What is it for something to exist? What are the conditions necessary for its existence? What might be the relations of dependency among things that exist? The ontological debate within the social sciences considers the relationship between the two dimensions of human behavior (Wendt, 1991): the external – structuralism (embracing, *inter alia*, anthropological structuralism, functional-structuralism, historical materialism, linguistic structuralism, hermeneutic phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, language games, post-structuralism and post-modernism, and the internal – agency (embracing, *inter alia*, rational choice theory, social phenomenology, dramaturgical analysis and ethnomethodology). Structuralism's central proposition is that "social structures [the ordered social interrelationships, or the recurring patterns of social behavior that determine the nature of human action" (Parker, 2000, p. 125)] impose themselves and exercise power on agency. Social structures are regarded as constraining in that they mould people's actions and thoughts, and in that it is difficult, if not impossible, for one person to transform these structures (Baert, 1998, p. 11). In contradistinction, agency's central proposition is that "individuals have some control over their actions and can be agents of their actions (voluntarism), enabled by their psychological and social psychological make-up" (Parker, 2000, p. 125). Thus, "people actively interpret their surrounding reality, and act accordingly" (Baert, 1998, p. 3). The essential distinction concerns causation: structuralism contends that social action derives from social structures, whereas agency contends that social action derives from individual intention – the "top-down" structural approach versus the "bottom-up" agency approach (Hollis, 1994, pp. 12-20). Neither approach is adequate to explain the observed complexity of human society. Structuralism

can apparently explain the empirically strong correlations between individual behavior and social cohort, but it cannot explain outliers derived from acts of free choice, and agency has the reverse difficulty of not being able to deal with structural imperatives.

From these epistemological and ontological dichotomies emerge four methodological families, which provide a set of lens through which the nature of the social world is perceived (see Figure 1).

A philosophical taxonomy of “good” management practice

Each of the methodological families identified in Figure 1 supports a coherent set of management philosophies, enquiry methods, practices and behaviors. Each predisposes its adherents to particular forms of reasoning and to particular nomological presumptions about how people are likely to behave in given situations. Each, then, offers its adherents a set of “good” management practice propositions. Each, however, is fundamentally philosophically flawed. In other words, managers whose patterns of management practice are based on the denial of naturalist or hermeneutic epistemology will be unable to deal with management issues that stem from the excluded epistemology. Similarly, the

		Epistemology	
		Naturalism	Hermeneutics
Ontology	Structuralism	<p>Naturalist Structuralism:</p> <p>Presumes an objective social world, knowable by the application of the scientific method, in which structures exercise power over agency, which makes human behavior predictable.</p> <p><i>“Managing for process”</i></p>	<p>Hermeneutic Structuralism:</p> <p>Presumes a subjective social world, knowable only as it is socially constructed, with people’s action being determined, and made predictable, by their collective interpretation of this reality.</p> <p><i>“Managing for inclusion”</i></p>
	Agency	<p>Naturalist Agency:</p> <p>Presumes an objective social world, knowable by the application of the scientific method, in which people are agents of their actions, with their behavior made predictable by their unconstrained self-interest.</p> <p><i>“Managing for results”</i></p>	<p>Hermeneutic Agency:</p> <p>Presumes a subjective social world that is contestably knowable as what people believe it to be, with agency constrained by their subjective perceptions of social reality, which makes human behavior unpredictable.</p> <p><i>“Managing for survival”</i></p>

Figure 1. Epistemological and ontological underpinnings of contending “good” management propositions

denial of structuralist or agency ontology will make managers unable to deal with management issues that stem from the excluded ontology.

The naturalist-agency perspective

Managers predisposed to a naturalist-agency philosophical stance would be favorably disposed towards an organization that has an entrepreneurial orientation (Mintzberg, 1989), and a primary concern with outputs and outcome. This, they would picture (Morgan, 1986) as a living organism, or in a state of flux and transformation. Their inclination would be to ensure that any organization they manage has an organic or organismic structure, characterized by low complexity, low formalization and low centralization (Burns and Stalker, 1961; Hague, 1978), because they believe that decisions should be taken closest to the point where the need for such decisions arises, thereby maximizing individual autonomy. Their organization would thus have a strategic apex with little or no techno-structure, but a significant degree of horizontal and/or spatial sub-unit differentiation (Williamson, 1985, 1986). It would also have a decision-making process that could become consultative when necessary, and which uses instrumentally rational analysis, premised on the self-interest motivation of all actors, to facilitate optimal decision-making. In terms of Thompson's (1967) decision-making strategies matrix, they would prefer judgmental decision-making strategies, as they are inclined to be certain about outcome preferences, but uncertain in their beliefs about cause-effect relations. Thus, they would be willing to operate at the edge of competence by dealing with what they do not yet know, using an integrative approach to problem solving that challenges established management practices by going beyond received wisdom (Kanter, 1989).

"Good" management would be perceived by naturalist-agency managers as managing for results, with a focus on performance. Thus, such managers would seek to improve results by relying on a decentralized authority distribution, so as to expand the ways in which work is conducted, with employees expected to use their devolved authority to achieve management-established targets, and with control being exercised *ex post* (Feldman and Khademian, 2000, p. 150). This is premised on human behavior being predictable on the basis of self-interest. Thus, employees are presumed to be instrumental, applying functional-strategic rationality to make purposive and predatory decisions on the basis of their own self-interest. Organizational commitment can, thus, only occur if it is personally profitable.

Naturalist-agency managers, with their homo economicus or rational economic man perceptions (Schein, 1980), would be sympathetic to Herzberg's (1966) "Adam" conception of human nature, and would thus presume that people are concerned predominantly with satisfying their safety, security and inter-personal relations needs. They would also be attracted to McGregor's (1960, 1967) Theory X human nature assumptions: that employees are

essentially indolent, unambitious, self-centered; are indifferent to organizational needs and prefer to be directed so as to avoid responsibility; and are gullible. So, they would accept Barnard's (1938, p. 159) proposition that "incentives represent the final residue of all conflicting forces in organization" and that people are rational agents who respond to inputs (such as instructions) in systematic ways and can best be motivated by financial incentives (see also Bushardt *et al.*, 1986; Clark and Wilson, 1961; de Grazia, 1960; Whyte, 1955). They would anticipate that employee dissatisfaction at work is, in terms of Herzberg *et al.* (1959), see also Herzberg (1966) job hygiene work environment factors, because of money, status and security. Their sense of competition would make them particularly sensitive to remuneration equitability in terms of the distributive justice outcomes achieved (Adams, 1965; Greenberg, 1987). Their underlying motivational presumption is that employees respond only to financial incentives. This is because they presume that employees value financial reward as a means of satisfying their material and psychological needs, the most important of which are Maslow's (1970) physiological, safety (security) and esteem needs, and Riesman's (1950) and Packard's (1959) prestige needs (Furnham, 1984; Porter and Lawler, 1965); that employees can justify their efforts only in terms of those rewards; that employees do not anticipate that any increased individual performance will become a new minimum standard; and that organizational performance can be measurably attributed to an employee's work contribution (Handy, 1976, p. 25). Their psychological contracts with employees would be designed on the presumption that they exercise resource, reward, economic or exchange power and that employees are calculative, and thus would make quite explicit material rewards that would follow the rendering of services. This would be expressly incorporated into principal-agent contracts. Employees would be expected to have work commitment, in Morrow's (1983) terms, based on their careers, which would achieve Etzioni's (1961) remunerative-calculative organizational engagement.

The leadership style of naturalist-agency managers would be that of a developer (Nichols, 1986), within a consultative management system (Likert, 1961, 1967). This style is characterized by Hershey and Blanchard's (1969, 1993) low relationship and low task behavior pattern, and broadly corresponds with Blake and Mouton's (1982, 1984) impoverished leadership style. In terms of Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1973) leadership behavior continuum, it involves managers defining limits and followers making decisions. This facilitates employee autonomy by appropriately delegating decision-making and implementation responsibility.

The naturalist-agency managers' approach to management would involve creating incentives (rewarding of desirable behaviors) and disincentives (punishing of undesirable behaviors), which are embodied in performance-reward contracts. They would thus build an organizational

culture that is focused not only on task, whereby management is regarded as solving a series of task-related problems involving the adjustment, redefinition and renegotiation of individual tasks (Handy, 1979), but also on supporting *quid pro quo* exchanges between individuals. The control mechanism they would institute would thus be self-control (under the self-determined coercive influence of material incentives). This involves the modifying, repressing or inhibiting of behavior to conform with a set of “internalized rules and norms of behavior relating the processes (methods of work) and outputs (standards) and internalized values relating to the ethical conduct of those carrying out the work itself” (Hales, 2001, p. 47). They would expect this to induce instrumental compliance (Etzioni, 1961) with the organizational rules and procedures from employees, on the basis of their economic calculation of the net compliance benefits.

Managers who adhere to the naturalist-agency methodology face two salient management risks. The first is that problem definition becomes problematic when its nature and causation can only be understood by the application of the denied hermeneutic epistemology. The second risk is that implementing problem solutions becomes problematic if it cannot accommodate behavior that is induced by deontological moral considerations (such as organizational loyalty). Thus, those who adhere to this methodology find problematic addressing how employees can be prevented from shirking in conditions of uncertainty and asymmetrical information (Fama and Jensen, 1983a, b; Leibenstein, 1976; Ross, 1973) – the principal-agent problem. Central to this are two further risks. The first is that, because of uncertainty and opportunism, managers will not be able to specify completely and comprehensively the implicit and explicit contracts they have with their employees, in terms of the activities, outputs and outcomes they are expected to deliver in return for their remuneration (Hood, 1986, p. 102). The second is that they will not be able to enforce the executed contracts. In the absence of a comprehensive set of complete and enforceable contracts, managers would be unable either to attribute the cause of poor organizational performance exclusively to non-contractual factors, or to determine a negotiated, contractual solution to those problems.

If faced with the prospect of poor organizational performance, naturalist-agency managers would in the first instance blame bad luck or the rogue behavior of employees who have not acted in accordance with the terms of their performance-reward contracts. Their envisaged solution would be for them to be more diligent in the drafting of principal-agent contracts and to their enforcement. This, they would expect, would initiate the economic calculations needed to induce the instrumental compliance necessary from employees to correct the poor organizational performance.

The naturalist-structuralist perspective

Managers predisposed to a naturalist-structuralist philosophical stance would have a disposition towards an organization that is bureaucratic (Weber, 1947) with a primary concern with inputs and getting the process right. This, they would picture (Morgan, 1986) as a machine or a brain. They would institute a mechanistic structure with high complexity, high formalization and high centralization (Burns and Stalker, 1961). Their inclination would be to ensure that any organization they manage has have a centralized techno-structure, standardized work processes, specialized work tasks, order and discipline, and a unity of direction and control. Their organization would engage in the top-down bonding of employees, through the fostering of an appropriate *esprit de corp*, with an insistence on hierarchical obedience and organizational loyalty (Burns, 1966; Burns and Stalker, 1961; Radner, 1992; Taylor, 1947). It would have a decision-making process that presumes decisions are the product of institutional activity by managers using functional-analytic analysis to generate a set of objective facts, which are used to make satisficing decisions (Simon, 1960) that produce incremental change. In terms of Thompson's (1967) decision-making strategies matrix, they would prefer computational decision-making strategies, because they are inclined to be certain about both outcome preferences and their beliefs about cause-effect relations.

"Good" management would be perceived by naturalist-structuralist managers as managing for process, with a focus on employee compliance. Thus, they would ensure that organizational policies and practices are implemented that give minimal discretion to employees. Administrative processes would be strictly controlled by rules and regulations that define who should complete a task, how and when it should be done. Control would be exercised *ex ante* (Feldman and Khademian, 2000, p. 150). This is premised on human behavior being predictable on the basis of rational thought constrained by hierarchically determined values and beliefs, with organizational commitment presumed to be to correct procedures and managers.

Naturalist-structuralist managers, with their *homo hierarchus* perceptions (Dumont, 1970), would be sympathetic to Herzberg's (1966) presumptions of the "Adam" conception of human nature, and to McGregor's (1960, 1967) Theory X human nature assumptions. They would anticipate that employee dissatisfaction at work is, in terms of Herzberg *et al.*'s (1959); Herzberg (1966) job hygiene work environment factors, because of working conditions, status and security. Their respect for rules and regulations would make them particularly sensitive to the procedural justice achieved by the methods used to determine remuneration, a key status indicator (Adams, 1965; Greenberg, 1987). They would believe that employees can best be motivated by the organizational satisfaction of their material and psychological needs. The needs they would focus on would be Maslow's (1970), physiological, safety (security), social (affiliation) and esteem needs; Ardrey's (1967) identity,

security and stimulation needs; Adler's (1938) power needs; White's (1959) competence needs; and Barrett, 1958; McClland *et al.*, 1953) achievement, power and affiliation needs. Their underlying motivational presumptions are that employees have a set of valued personal material and psychological needs, that are knowable by them and can be satisfied through work. They would anticipate that employee dissatisfaction at work is, in terms of Herzberg *et al.* (1959); Herzberg (1966) job hygiene work environment factors, because of policies and administration, supervision, working conditions and interpersonal relations. Their psychological contracts with employees would be designed on the presumption that they exercise legitimate, expert, knowledge and exchange power (Boulder, 1990; French and Raven, 1959; Hales, 2001), and that employees are predominantly calculative, and thus would make quite explicit claims on the rights and obligations of the organization, in terms of the needs that would be met in return for services rendered (Handy, 1976, p. 41). Employees would be expected to have a work commitment, in Morrow's (1983) terms, based on the value they place on their organizational loyalty, which would achieve a weak form of Etzioni's (1961) remunerative-calculative organizational engagement.

The leadership style of naturalist-structuralist managers would be parental (Nichols, 1986), within a benevolent-authoritarian or consultative type of management system (Likert, 1961, 1967). This style is characterized by Hershey and Blanchard's (1969, 1993) high relationship and high task behavior pattern, which broadly corresponds with Blake and Mouton's (1982, 1984) team leadership style. In terms of Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1973) leadership behavior continuum, it involves leaders making decisions and announcing them. The focus of leadership is thus on explaining decisions, providing opportunities for clarification, and monitoring performance, thereby ensuring leadership control.

The naturalist-structuralist managers' approach to management would involve the application of a hierarchical command-and-control process that permits them to determine and police what are acceptable (desirable) or unacceptable (undesirable) employee behaviors in terms of the desired organizational outcomes. They would thus build an organizational culture that emphasizes role, supports compliance and permits little questioning of the rules and orders once they have been given by a legitimate authority (Bardach and Kagan, 1982). This would support a club culture, whereby strong leaders have power and use it (Handy, 1979). The appropriate control mechanism would be external control, given the weaker coercive influence of needs-satisfying motivators. This would involve both formal and impersonal rules relating to inputs (about recruitment, qualifications and experience), processes (as technical methods and procedures) and outputs (as performance measures and standards); and informally transmitted values (as organizational ethos or

philosophy) achieved by direct management supervision in the form of personal monitoring and work surveillance (Hales, 2001, pp. 47-48).

Managers who adhere to the naturalist-structuralist methodology face the salient management risk of losing control over, or the trust of, their employees. This is because they are unable to understand either the nature and causation of management problems that cannot be analyzed and explained by the application of naturalist methods, or why their solutions, which presume a structuralist ontology, are unable to secure compliance, on the basis of deontological moral arguments (such as organizational loyalty), by free employees who consider themselves immune to the influence of structural imperatives. In the absence of employee control and trust, the manager would not be able to apportion blame for any organizational failures exclusively on to deviant employees who failed to comply with organizational rules and regulations.

If faced with the prospect of poor organizational performance, the naturalist-structuralist managers' first instinct would be to express loyalty (Hirschman, 1970) to their superiors, in the hope that solutions will eventually emerge. They would then blame non-compliant (deviant) employees. Their envisaged solution would be to strengthen hierarchical controls, supported by the inculcation of a deontological moral code that emphasizes duty and responsibility.

The hermeneutic-structuralist perspective

Managers predisposed to a hermeneutic-structuralist philosophical stance would have a disposition towards an organization that has a missionary orientation (Mintzberg, 1989), and a primary concern on process, as much as goals and end-states. This they would picture (Morgan, 1986) as a political system, or a configuration of cultures. Their inclination would be to ensure that any organization they manage has an organic structure, characterized by low complexity, low formalization and low centralization (Burns and Stalker, 1961; Hague, 1978; Mintzberg, 1979), so as to empower groups of employees to take responsibility for their own work design and performance. Their organization would have a decision-making process that is collegial, harmonious and trustworthy, and that involves the application of critical rationality in its continual striving to unearth the collectively determined sensible and practicable good, achieved by a group consensus through discourses on contestable values and standards. In terms of Thompson's (1967) decision-making strategies matrix, they would prefer compromise decision-making strategies, as they are inclined to be uncertain about competing outcome preferences, but certain in their beliefs about cause-and-effect relations.

"Good" management would be perceived by hermeneutic-structuralist managers as managing for inclusion, with a focus on building capacity to

achieve results. Thus, managers would encourage employees, as well as perhaps members of the general public and other relevant organizations, to work together towards the achievement of results over which they may have little direct influence. This they would seek to achieved by increasing employee engagement with the organization, which they would see as a product of decentralizing authority, and emphasizing empowerment, teamwork, and continuous performance improvement. Management control is accomplished by the way they implement participation (Feldman and Khademian, 2000, p. 150). This is premised on human behavior being predictable on the basis of group-constructed understandings. Thus, employees are presumed to be cooperative by nature; ever willing and able to construct the mutual understandings that form the basis for reasoning, what Gergen and Thatchenkey (1998, p. 26) describe as “communal negotiation, the importance of social processes in the observational enterprise, the sociopractical functions of language, and the significance of pluralistic cultural investments in the conception of the true and the good.” They are thus presumed able and willing to engage in critically reflective, intersubjective communications, in order to gain understanding in a group context (see also Bhaskar, 1998; Reason and Rowan, 1981; Gergen, 1994). This means that, because discourse occurs in an open environment characterized by broadly diffused transformations (Bakhtin, 1981; Foucault, 1978), patterns of human activity are ever dynamic, at times incrementally, sometimes disjointedly (Gergen and Thatchenkey, 1998, p. 28). Thus, employees’ organizational commitment is to those with whom they share common values and a common vision.

Hermeneutic-structuralists, with their homo sociologicus or social man perceptions (Schein, 1980), would be sympathetic to Herzberg’s (1966) presumptions of the “Abraham” conception of human nature, and would thus presume that people are concerned predominantly with satisfying human needs of understanding, achievement, and psychological growth and development. They would also be attracted to McGregor’s (1960, 1967) Theory Y human nature assumptions, which are that people find work as natural as rest and recreation, can assume responsibility, are not resistant to organizational needs if they are committed, can be creative in solving organizational problems, and are willing to direct their behavior towards organizational goals. They would anticipate that employee dissatisfaction at work is, in terms of Herzberg *et al.* (1959), Herzberg (1966) job hygiene work environment factors, because of working conditions, status and security. Their sense of collegiality would make them particularly sensitive to remuneration equitability issues, both with respect to the distributional justice outcomes achieved and, perhaps more importantly, to the procedural justice achieved by the methods used to determine remuneration (Adams, 1965; Greenberg, 1987). They would believe that employees can best be motivated by setting goals

(Locke, 1968; Locke and Latham, 1990) to which they can make a commitment. Their underlying motivational presumption is that employees want to share responsibility for goal setting (House and Mitchell, 1974) because there is a congruence between individual and organizational goals. This enables an organization to meet its employees' needs, the most important of which are Maslow's (1970) social (affiliation or acceptance), esteem and self-actualization (distinctive psychological potential) needs, Ardrey's (1967) identity, security and stimulation needs, Alderfer's (1972) existence, relatedness and growth needs, and McClland's (McClland, 1961; McClland *et al.*, 1953) achievement, power and affiliation needs, and Herzberg *et al.* (1959); Herzberg (1966) achievement, recognition, Their psychological contracts with employees would be designed on the presumption that they exercise personal, referent and normative power, and that employees are cooperative, and thus would be premised on the idea that employees tend to identify with organizational goals, which they pursue creatively in return for just rewards. Employees should thus be given more voice in their selection and more discretion on the choice of goal-achievement strategies (Handy, 1976, p. 41). Employees would be expected, in Morrow's (1983) terms, to have a work commitment based on the value they place on work as an end in itself, on their absorption and involvement in their job, and on their organization and sectional interest loyalties, which would achieve Etzioni's (1961) normative-moral organizational engagement.

The leadership style of hermeneutic-structuralist managers would be that of a coach (Nichols, 1986), within a participative-group type of management system (Likert, 1961; 1967). This style is characterized by Hershey and Blanchard's (1969, 1993) high relationship and low task behavior pattern, which broadly corresponds with Blake and Mouton's (1982, 1984) country club leadership style. Under this leadership style the production of outcomes is incidental to the lack of conflict and good fellowship. In terms of Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1973) leadership behavior continuum, it involves managers permitting followers to function within the limits they define. The leadership focus is thus on sharing ideas and facilitating group decision-making, thereby empowering individuals.

The hermeneutic-structuralist managers' approach to management would involve inspiring a sense of performance consciousness in the form of a mutually agreed set of high performance expectations. Communicating a values-driven performance philosophy would do this by stimulating and facilitating the necessary behavior change by empowering employees to become creative risk takers and innovators. They would build an organizational culture that would be centered existentially on the person, such that the organization would be perceived to exist in order to help employees achieve their personal goals (Handy, 1979). Peters and Waterman (1982) have argued that communicating a values-driven performance philosophy can be achieved by means of management by wandering around

(Peters, 1994). The appropriate control mechanism would be mutual control, involving the group enforcement of behavior norms relating to inputs (as standards of recruitment to the group), processes (as work methods), outputs (as performance standards), and values (as ethical standards) (Hales, 2001, p. 47). The expected response induced would be compliance because of moral commitment (Etzioni, 1961).

Managers who adhere to the hermeneutic-structuralist methodology face the salient management risk that employees engaged in participative processes cannot agree on either the nature and causation of organizational problems, because they cannot be analyzed and understood only by the application of hermeneutic methods, or why their solutions, which presume structural ontology, are unable to secure compliance by free employees on the basis of deontological moral arguments (such as work group loyalty). In the absence of decision-making processes that are collegial, harmonious and trustworthy, they would not be able to externalize blame for any poor or exclusively onto particular secret enemies within participative processes.

If faced with the prospect of poor organizational performance hermeneutic-structuralist managers would, in the first instance, exercise voice (Hirschman, 1970), and blame those within the organizational processes who do not share their commitment to participative management and decision making. Their envisaged solution would be to demand the removal of the secret enemies from within and the empowerment of different people to lead participative processes. This would involve developing strategies that would not only correct poor organizational performance, but also evoke a moral commitment to participative processes.

The hermeneutic-agency perspective

While people predisposed to a hermeneutic-structuralist philosophical disposition embrace a wide range of behavior, as noted by Goffman (1990), in management they are associated with those whose whose management behavior manifests as the absence of any desire to explain or influence events, or to hold any value commitments because they have been alienated from life. They would institute a bureaucratic structure, with a primary concern with inputs and process, in which there is an obsession with control. This, they would picture (Morgan, 1986) as a psychic prison or an instrument of domination, with organizational processes that give rise to "low-cooperation, rule-bound approaches to organization". Their organization would thus have a mechanistic structure exhibiting high complexity, high formalization and high centralization. Their intention, however, would be to ensure that it can accommodate ambiguous, mutually reinforcing perceptions of its intent, understanding, history and organization (March and Olsen, 1976). They would never resolve organizational conflicts, organizational uncertainties would always be avoided, and organizational solutions would inevitably be

shortsighted and simplistic. This is because they perceive decision-making processes are dominated by the unknowing and the untrustworthy, which means that policy, because of the limits of human cognition, can only be the product of garbage can-like decision processes (March and Olsen, 1976). This is described by Cohen *et al.* (1972, p. 2) as “a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they may be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they may be answers, and decision makers looking for work.”

“Good” management would be perceived by hermeneutic-agency managers as managing for survival, with plausibility as the basis for reasoning, involving a Weickian-like sense-making process (Weick, 1995). Thus, they engage in non-rational, inspirational-strategic reasoning because they consider validity, truth, and efficiency to be irrelevant. They would act on the presumption that what the organization is capable of doing can only be established by trial and error, which means that its goals can only evolve from action. Learning can thus only be achieved by trial and error. Technology is always unclear. And who is involved in what is ever changing, because participation is fluid. This characterizes March’s (1988, 1994) organized anarchy (see also Cyert and March, 1992; March and Olsen, 1976, 1989). Their underlying premise is that human behavior is unpredictable, because agency is defined by subjective perceptions of social reality. What an individual believes to be real is, in fact, reality.

Such hermeneutic-agency managers would be sympathetic to Herzberg’s (1966) presumptions of the “Adam” conception of human nature, and to McGregor’s (1960, 1967) Theory X human nature assumptions. They would certainly believe that employees would be generally dissatisfied with Herzberg’s *et al.* (1959), Herzberg (1966) job hygiene work environment factors, particularly policies and administration, supervision, working conditions, money, status and security. Their cynicism and distrust would make them particularly sensitive to the issues of equity of remuneration, both in terms of the distributional justice outcomes achieved and the procedural justice achieved by the methods used to determine remuneration (Adams, 1965; Greenberg, 1987). So to them compliance occurs only because of fear of punishment that would diminish their employees’ capacity to meet their physiological and safety (security) needs (Maslow, 1970). Their underlying motivational presumptions are that employees have to be sufficiently fearful of punishment to ensure compliance, and that they have the power to punish. Their psychological contracts with employees would be designed on the presumption that they would exercise coercive, physical or threat power, and that employees would comply explicitly with the rules to avoid punishments (Handy, 1976, p. 40). Employees would be presumed to have no work commitment, which would result in Etzioni’s (1961) coercive-alienative organizational engagement.

The leadership style would be that of a driver (Nichols, 1986) within an exploitative-authoritarian type of management system (Likert, 1961, 1967). This style is characterized by Hershey and Blanchard's (1969, 1993) low relationship and high task behavior pattern, which broadly corresponds with Blake and Mouton's (1982, 1984) task leadership style. In terms of Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1973) leadership behavior continuum, it involves leaders making decisions and announcing them. This involves managers providing specific instructions and closely supervising work performance, thereby ensuring dominant leadership. They would thus build an organizational culture that emphasizes power, and reinforces the authority of a superior over subordinates, so supporting a club culture under which strong leaders would be permitted, if not expected, to exercise power (Handy, 1979).

Their approach to management would involve hierarchical command-and-control, with the expected response being alienative compliance (Etzioni, 1961), born of the fear of force, threat and menace. The expected control mechanism would be external control (Hales, 2001, p. 47), particularly by means of random direct supervision. This could encompass the "contrived randomness" mode of control with hierarchical accountability (Hood, 1986, pp. 64-68; Rose-Ackerman, 1978), "'dual key' operations (that is, several people needed to commit funds or other resources, or separation of payments and authorization) with an unpredictable pattern of posting decision-makers or supervisors around the organization's empire" as well as "random internal audits" (Hood, 1986, p. 65).

Managers who adhere to the hermeneutic agency methodology face the salient management risk that if anyone is able to establish that management can intentionally and instrumentally promote and protect organizational interests, then the justification for their reluctance to do so has been negated.

If faced with the prospect that they could have acted intentionally and instrumentally to enhance organizational performance, they would, in the first instance, deny that such a proposition can be proven. Then, they would blame fate for their lack of desire to explain or influence events, or to hold any values commitment. Their envisaged solution would be to leave well enough alone. This solution would involve resisting vigorously any fate-tempting management innovation, which would only make matters worse.

The philosophical conditions for coherent management praxis

Social theory suggests that the way forward is to embrace, as a process of inclusion, Habermas' notion of communicative rationality (Habermas, 1968, 1971, 1975, 1984, 1986, 1987, 1996a, b; Barnes, 1974; Feyerabend, 1976; Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Kuhn, 1970), which Dryzek (1987, p. 434) defined as:

[A form of social interaction that] is free from domination (the exercise of power), strategic behavior by the actors involved, and (self) deception]. Further, all actors should be equally and fully capable of making and questioning arguments (that is, they should be

communicatively competent). There should be no restrictions on the participation of these competent actors. Under these conditions, the only remaining authority is that of a “good” argument, which can be advanced on behalf of the veracity of empirical description, explanation, and understanding, and just as importantly, the validity of normative judgements.

This would involve the creation of reflexive and pluralised organizational structures and management practices that can accommodate a variety of epistemological and ontological imperatives.

In the face of incompatible epistemological and ontological contentions, the contemporary philosophy of the social sciences offers a way forward, through the diverse philosophical and methodological work of Archer (1990, 1995, 1996), Bhaskar (1998), Bourdieu (1998), and Giddens (1984, 1993). They have heralded a very clear attempt to reconcile the epistemological limitations of naturalism and hermeneutics, resulting in the transcendental realism synthesis (Bhaskar, 1998), and the ontological inadequacies of structure and agency, resulting in the (post)structuration synthesis (Archer, 1995; Bourdieu, 1998; Giddens, 1984, 1993).

Transcendental realism (Bhaskar, 1998), the epistemological synthesis, is concerned with the nature of factual description of the real world and offers a process by which its causal mechanisms can be. It makes two fundamental claims. The first is that the real world operates at three levels: the actual (events or processes as they are), the empirical (the perceived nature of those events or processes open to the observer) and the deep (the underlying mechanisms or imperatives that cause these events or processes (Baert, 1998, p. 191). Knowledge of the real world, then, rests on unreliable empirical perceptions of the actual world, which is quite removed from any deep explanations of it. Bhaskar (1998, p. 11) thus draws a distinction between the transitive objects or phenomena (objects or phenomena as they are experienced) and the intransitive objects or phenomena (objects or phenomena as they are in reality). The second claim is that discoveries about the real world is a cumulative process of hermeneutic-based imaginative model building, whereby transitive knowledge is used to postulate hypothetical causal mechanisms that, if they exist, would explain any intransitive phenomenon under investigation. Transcendental realism does not overcome the uncertainties identified by the earlier naturalists, for problems of induction and the theory-laden nature of observation remain (Popper, 2000). However, it does embrace them at the ontological level, and it does adopt more sophisticated criteria for reality, one that is free from the constraints of strict falsificationism. It also offers a potential reconciliation of the hermeneutic aspects of scientific discovery identified by Kuhn (1970) with an empirical-based approach to inference to the best explanation; that is the process of choosing the hypothesis or theory that best explains available data (Wendt, 1991).

The (post)structuration ontological synthesis is as the attempt to adjudicate the ontological tensions between structure and agency (Archer, 1995; Bourdieu,

1998; Giddens, 1984, 1993). In contention is whether agency and social structure are interdependent, in a duality relationship as asserted by Giddens (1984, p. xxiii) (“The reflexive capacities of the human actor are characteristically involved in a continuous manner with the flow of day-to-day conduct in the contexts of social activity”), or interdependent but different and thus distinguishable (in an analytically dualist or morphogenetic relationship, as asserted by Archer), which means that, with time and power, social structure is both a cause and a consequence of agency (Parker, 2000).

The combination of transcendental realism and (post)structuration suggest a fifth methodological position. This is one that presumes a world in which events or processes are knowable, the nature of which, however, can be only unreliably and contestedly perceived by an observer, and in which structure and agency only have properties that are manifest in, and reproduced or transformed through, social practice. The knowledge so gained can be used to generate hypothetical causal explanations for the observed events or processes, for which empirical corroboration can be sought. The discovery of an intransitive generative mechanism becomes, itself, a new phenomenon that needs to be explained. Progressively, deeper levels of explanation of the social world are thereby generated by this methodology. When applied to management, this fifth methodological position progressively facilitates deeper levels of understanding of management events and processes, permits more subtle explanations of organizational and management problems, and facilitates the enhancement of organizational learning through the reflexive capacities of those it empowers.

In seeking to understand the causes of organizational and management problems, transcendental realists would accept that events occur and processes exist, but would be skeptical of any empirical generalizations about their causation derived from naturalist methods, which they would treat only as preliminary working hypotheses. They would search for a deep understanding of the underlying causation mechanism or imperatives. This would require them to engage with other relevant actors in acts of reflexive interpretation of problems, so as to ensure that they have an appropriate contextualisation of meaning, which would involve the application of hermeneutic methods that would enable them to identify perspective reciprocities that result from acts of ideation that rest on intersubjectively shared symbols. This cumulative process of hermeneutic-based imaginative organization and management model building involves transitive knowledge being used to postulate hypothetical causal mechanisms which, if they can be empirically demonstrated to exist, would explain the relevant intransitive organizational and management phenomena. This would involve a search for empirical corroboration. If such confirmation is possible then a new intransitive generative mechanism would have been discovered, which would, in turn, become a new phenomenon to be explained. Transcendental realism thus leads progressively to deeper levels of

explanation of management events or processes, thereby permitting more subtle explanations of organizational and management problems.

In seeking to identify how best to deal with organizational and management problem for which subtle explanation has been found and agreed on, (post)structuralists would accept that managers and employees have the necessary reflexive capacities to solve them, but those capacities can only be actualized, so becoming meaningful human action, when they are empowered and enabled to draw on the structural properties of their organization. This reflexive capacity is the embodied understanding they gain by engaging with organizational and management practice, thereby enabling them to learn by trial and error and from the mistakes made by others, so as to determine the relevance of general principles (such as rules, recipes, formal procedures and judgmental criteria). By this means they are able to garner the understanding needed to solve the organizational and management problem as they conduct their affairs with and within their organization. The resultant social practice, mobilized as it is in a continuous manner with the flow of day-to-day conduct, will, in turn, transform the enabling structural properties of the organization. This creates the potential for further organizational and management problems, so necessitating the prospect of further organizational learning as the search for problem explanation and solution continues.

The acceptance of this synthetic philosophical stance, however, generates serious epistemological and ontological challenges for those engaged in management development.

Implications for management praxis

The organizational world as perceived through the critical-realist-(post)structuration lens, requires managers to be philosophically reflective, and thus able to identify their own and others epistemological and ontological predispositions, to understand and accept the implications of those philosophical predispositions for their management performance and the performance of their organization, and to embrace the following three “good management” propositions.

First, good managers would recognize the limitations of the cognitive-rational (objective meaning) and communicative-rational (normative meaning) dimensions of their cognitive map of management and organizational reality. They would be epistemologically and ontologically sophisticated enough to accept that what constitutes “good” management practice is an essentially contested concept, clarifiable through constructive discourse. Thus, they would actively seek insights into what might work in particular management situations by engaging with those who hold different philosophical dispositions. They thus would see such constructive discourse within their organization as normal, even if it has the propensity to create organizational conflict, and, most certainly, as necessary, in order to create

creative opportunities for managers and employees with contending philosophical perspectives to find solutions to threatening organizational problems.

Second, good managers would not have the epistemological and ontological arrogance to assert that they are able to understand, and perhaps even solve, all organizational problems. They would be skeptical of any empirical generalizations about problem causation, consequence and solution. These they would treat only as preliminary working hypotheses. They would thus seek to deepen their problem understanding by engaging in acts of ideation with those who hold different philosophical dispositions, which would allow the perspectives reciprocity needed for a reflexive interpretation to emerge that would ensure an appropriate contextualisation of meaning.

Third, good managers would learn how to comprehend and evaluate the intended meaning of the contending arguments based on a diversity of epistemological and ontological perspectives. They would settle in their own minds competing epistemological and ontological claims with consistency and without recourse to intentional activities and motivated processes that enable self-deception or self-delusion. They would thereby confront unpleasant truths or issues rather than resort to the mental states of ignorance, false belief, unwarranted attitudes and inappropriate emotions (Haight, 1980). They would accept that the best outcomes that can be expected from constructive discourses are sets of achievable organizational and management aspiration, implementable strategies, and a tolerable level of organizational conflict. They would see that being a good manager is an iterative process that involves learning-by-doing and learning-from-experience, about what is the right thing to do and how to do things right.

Conclusion

The configuration of epistemological and ontological perspectives that gives rise to a set methodological families offer incompatible contentions about what is knowable and can exist in the world in which managers conduct their affairs. Thus, they have incompatible contentions about the forms of reasoning that should be the basis for management thought and action, and about how people behave, or are prone to behave, in given situations. Each of them is, however, fundamentally flawed because underlying epistemological and ontological premises are fundamentally flawed.

The broad conclusion drawn is that good management requires the confrontation and integration of a disparate set of contending “good” management propositions. This requires managers to:

- recognize the limitations of their cognitive map of management and organizational reality, thereby avoiding epistemological and ontological arrogance;

- seek out and engage with those who disagree with their cognitive map of management and organizational reality;
- treat all knowledge claims skeptically, accepting that there are multiple standards by which they could be justified, particularly if they come from any ascendant epistemic community within the organization (whether founded on naturalism or hermeneutics);
- settle competing epistemological and ontological asseverations with consistency and without recourse to the self-deception or self-delusion that permits them to avoid unpleasant organizational truths.

Their challenge is to accept Barrett's (1958, p. 247) proposition that "the centuries-long evolution of human reason is one of man's greatest triumphs, but it is still in process, still incomplete, still to be".

Note

1. There are many such standards. A true belief or knowledge claim can be justified, for example:
 - on the evidence of sensory experiences, so becoming *a posteriori* knowledge (naturalized epistemology);
 - if there are sufficiently good justification reasons that are, themselves, either in need of no further supporting reasons (foundationalism) or are mutually supporting (coherentism) (Lucey, 1996);
 - if it is a product of a psychological process that produces a high proportion of true beliefs (reliabilism) (Alston, 1989);
 - if its prima facie justification cannot be made defective, as a source of knowledge, by being overridden or defeated by evidence that the subject does not possess (epistemic defeasibility) (Shope, 1983); and
 - if the degree of belief held in a true belief, which is a measure of the believer's willingness to act in accordance with that belief, conforms to the axioms of probability theory (probabilism) (Rosenkrantz, 1977).

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