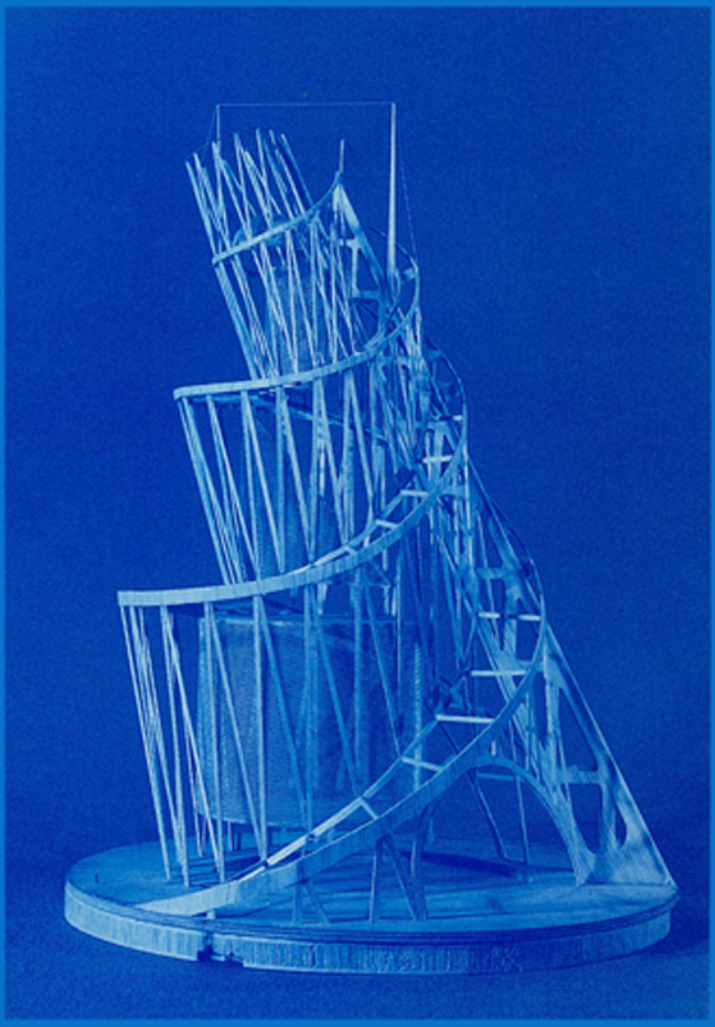
MANAGEMENT

A SOCIOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION



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FOR MARGARET AND GERRY

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1

Into the Heart of Darkness: A Short Theoretical Journey

> Theory is when you know everything and nothing works;
> Practice is when everything works and nobody knows why;
> Here we combine Theory with Practice:
> Nothing works and nobody knows why.
>
> (Anonymous)

Introduction

In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow, the narrator, tells the story of his journey up the river Congo in search of the mysterious Kurtz, an idealized figure of the company who, as Marlow approaches, takes on the appearance of increasing irrationality. When Marlow eventually reaches this European icon of morality he discovers a world of evil far darker than Marlow could ever have imagined, and Marlow is himself pushed to examine his own nature, character and morality. The story is open to many different interpretations or readings but the one I wish to pursue here is that epitomized by the contemporary rendering of Heart of Darkness, removed to South East Asia at the time of the Vietnamese War, in the film Apocalypse Now. In this film the all-American hero, or avenging angel, Captain Willard, played by Martin Sheen, once more sets out to discover the whereabouts of an errant colleague, but this time the mysterious Kurtz is transformed into a renegade American colonel, once again called Kurtz, played by Marlon Brando. Colonel Kurtz is intent on turning himself into a war-lord over a drug-infested corner of Cambodia. The heroic journey to

eliminate the stain on America that the Colonel represents becomes increasingly harrowing as the avenging angel perceives the irrationality and destruction wrought by his comrades in pursuit of the communist enemy, and by the time he reaches the villain it is no longer clear to him who is responsible for the death and destruction; who is rational and who is not. In one scene, amidst the destruction of a Vietnamese village held by the communists (accompanied by the sound of Wagner's 'Ride of the Valkyries' blasting from the helicopter gunship's loudspeaker system), the colonel in command arranges for one of the troops to surf along a stretch of water at the point of a river that is still subject to enemy fire. 'It's pretty hairy in there sir . . . it's Charlie's [Communist] point', shouts one of the worried troops involved. 'Charlie don't surf', comes the laconic reply from the colonel. As Willard remarks to himself, 'I began to wonder what they had against Kurtz. It wasn't just murder and insanity – there was enough of that to go round for everyone.' In short, the journey is one of self-enlightenment through travelling into the heart of darkness to the place at which the traveller recognizes that Kurtz, the fallen idol, is as much a part of his own culture as Willard is. The journey can also be read as one intent on discovering the truth 'out there' but one which has become a journey of self-recognition, where to be insane is the norm and where what counts as 'the truth' and as normality lies in the external gaze of the assessor, not the internal renderings of rationality.

The analysis of management can be read through a similar frame – it has been scripted as a journey to acquire the secret of success, to drink from the 'holy grail' of managerial truth and to achieve the desired status of manager, or even better chief executive officer (CEO). Yet the journey through the maze of management texts leads in ever decreasing circles into the clear, cold knowledge that nobody really seems to be able to deliver the magic elixir. The budding manager could probably spend several years reading the management books at the airport and still be unsure as to the meaning or method of it all. In fact, one might want to consider such action as a clear sign of Kurtzian insanity in the knowledge that management fads and fashions seem to change with the seasons and that what counts as common sense one year will undoubtedly prove to be self-evident claptrap the following year.

At this point in the management journey it begins to dawn on our weary traveller, who has gone nowhere but read a lot, that the magic elixir is not something that can be drunk and possessed, to be redeployed at will on return to the office. Indeed, there may be a recognition that the journey was probably never going to lead to such a solution and our executive returns home to the office, despairing of a journey that has only persuaded him or her of something that many of us would

prefer not to know: that our understanding of the world – and thus the secret of management success – is imposed from without, a socially created, regulated and legitimated practice, not one subject to the measurable objectivity of facts or of truth.

This book is intended as a guidebook to the heart of darkness which I take to be management. Management is a mysterious thing in so far as the more research that is undertaken the less we seem to be able to understand. In a version of 'progressive ignorance', borrowed from Socrates, the higher the level of immersion in the waters of management the muddier the river becomes, as contradictory reports suggest a world of inordinate complexity and change that is only (temporarily) stabilized in space and time by the words on a page or the speech in a room. *If* the world of management really is as contingent and confused as the contradictory literature that piles up on my floor suggests, then there are at least two things we can do about it: first we can resort to the resplendent and worthy motto that has served most of us well for many years: 'Ignorance is bliss'. Under this strategy we smile smugly to ourselves about the inability of academic researchers to deliver the goods, that is to show managers how to manage better, and we manage in the way we always have done (and we don't make international comparisons to avoid any discomfort). Second, an alternative, and again well-tried and tested, strategy is to rely on consultants as a better bet: 'More expensive ignorance is better bliss.' Here we spend a small fortune on self-professed 'experts' (after all, if we could assess their expertise we would not need them, would we?), and if things do not quite go to plan we change the experts for better ones (that is, more expensive ones).

In this book I want to look at management through a third approach, rooted not in expertise but in recognition of ignorance, that is our very limited ability to understand and control the world, and in recognition that the quest for bliss, perfect harmony and the solution to our problems is itself very problematic in the light of our limited knowledge: 'In the world of the blind there are no one-eyed monarchs' (or 'Scepticism rules OK') might be an appropriate motto here.

The rest of this chapter is a brief theoretical journey through some contemporary theories of management and a sketch of what is to follow in the main body of the book. It is not a review of all, or even most, past or present sociological theories of management or organizations (see Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Morgan, 1986; Hassard and Pym, 1990; Reed and Hughes, 1992; Hassard and Parker, 1993; Hassard, 1993, for this). Rather, it is an attempt to situate some of the more radical methodological and epistemological developments in social theory in a managerial context.

This book does not pretend to be an introduction to *the* sociology of management, then, but *a* sociological introduction to management. The difference is that the former would require yet another grand run through the history and philosophy of many sociological traditions, whereas the latter is more concerned to outline and deploy one particular sociological approach to the substantive area considered as management. In short, the book concentrates on management rather than sociology. Sociology is my disciplinary background and provides the theoretical and methodological approach but I do not attempt to push the boundaries of sociological theory beyond their already wide compass.

Equally important, the book is not a sociological introduction to *all* aspects of management, for which a CD-ROM rather than a book might be more appropriate. Instead of providing a universally thin sociological veneer over management in general, then, this book provides an array of sociologically inspired enquiries of diverse substantive fields and at different levels of analysis. In keeping with the journey into the heart of darkness, the text sets out by providing a historical framework from which to assess the chosen subject, and proceeds to delve deeper and deeper into the managerial world. Thus, at the end of the historical scene setting, it proceeds by considering who the contemporary subjects actually are, what they do, and why they do what they do. It then steps continuously deeper, in a theoretical sense, by considering an array of substantive areas, first on appraisals and managing radical change like reengineering, two currently popular and practical dilemmas for management; and subsequently on leadership and culture, two topics with rather longer histories and more complex theoretical foundations. The penultimate two chapters, on gender and technology and on fatalism and freedom, take the journey further into the philosophical mist so that the journey itself ends not in the bright light of what we take to be reality but up against a raft of paradoxes that are reflected upon in the final chapter. In sum, the metaphorical journey ends, just as Conrad's did, back where we began, not necessarily finding any elixir but hopefully understanding why the journey went the way it did and what this might tell us about management and the role of theory.

Theory in management studies, perhaps more than almost any other academic context, arrives at the management student's door laden with moral and political baggage: theory, according to some anti-theoretical accounts, is apparently irrelevant to the 'real world' of management where decisions are taken on the basis of facts or rationality or whatever happens to be the anti-theoretician's particular animus. As I shall argue in the next chapter, the empiricist and positivist fascination with 'real facts' as opposed to 'vacuous theory' is itself particularly virulent in

Britain, it has been so for centuries, and it is not restricted to the world of management. This often becomes manifest in contrasts that are held to exist between the 'real' world and whatever is being deprecated, usually the 'unreal' world of academia. The criteria for constructing the boundary of reality have always escaped me. At the same time, debates *within* the world constructed by management theorists are often just as acrimonious as those that occur between management theorists and 'practitioners'. Perhaps the latter is an exaggeration since, by and large, practitioners of management very often do not engage in debate with theoreticians – they just ignore each other. In practice the whole circus appears vaguely ludicrous: those who argue that theory is irrelevant to the real world adopt a *theoretical* position in their anti-theoretical ardour which assumes that (theoretically) facts stand for themselves; that is, that the world of reality is self-evident and open to a non-theoretical investigative approach which will reveal the world in its transparently obvious truth. This, presumably, is why everyone agrees about everything – because everything is so blatantly obvious. On the other hand, if there are occasions where we disagree about the meaning of something, about whether something is true, about whether one thing caused another to happen, about the meaning of life – to name just a few problems – then perhaps we should consider what it is that the theories imply.

This chapter does not pretend to be neutral or disinterested but neither does it pretend to have discovered the holy grail of theoretical truth. This modesty is only partly motivated by theory itself, in that I will argue that a critical element of management lies in the way management is constructed through the accounts of various agents involved; hence what management is 'really' like is a function of the way we construct management in the first place. The other element of modesty derives from a recognition that *if* it is the case that we do not so much *discover* as *construct* management through our accounts then we can never be absolutely certain that we are right. Thus the relativist's dilemma – that everything is relative except this – cannot be transcended by dint of linguistic contortion (at least I don't know how to do it – though there may be a way). What I am concerned to do here, therefore, is to explain the consequences of certain theoretical positions and consider the heuristic limits of the constructivist approach. In doing so I hope to avoid the charge of labyrinthine linguistic complexity that so often allows the debate to founder on the reef of confusion. Naturally, my simplified version of the debate between modernism and postmodernism will, in all probability, not meet with universal approval – but that is inevitable in a world that requires interpretative effort, and anyway, if everyone agreed with *my* theoretical approach (which I

imagine to be more akin to a wobbly jelly than a neat path), the project might seem rather foolish.

In the world of management the modernist–postmodernist debate hinges on two rather different substantive areas. On the one hand the debate is concerned with the most appropriate way to *describe* the current state of the world: have we moved beyond the controlled world epitomized by the machinations of the Fordist assembly line and Taylorist time-and-motion experts, to a postmodern world where flexibility and change are endemic? On the other hand, the debate surrounds the way we understand the world. Can we rely on the rational, scientific and measurable methods of the modernist scientists and positivists, or should we abandon certainty and spend more effort in understanding how particular accounts are constructed in such a way that they appear to be legitimate, to generate a transparent account of the world, while all the time masking the opacity that postmodernists claim is an inevitable result of our necessary reliance upon language?

In the (modernist) descriptive beginning was industrial capitalism, a socio-economic system that rested upon the primacy of production where the real world and the fantasy world were kept separate. According to Baudrillard's postmodern account, the contemporary world is no longer dominated by production, as consumption has displaced it in economic significance and in terms of ideological influence to the extent that productively based social classes are displaced by identities constructed through consumption. Furthermore, the division between reality and fantasy are melded into one. Perhaps both these aspects can be captured in the theme parks that proliferate across the world. These palaces are neither fantasy nor real but both and neither simultaneously, and the patrons are distinguished by their spending patterns, not by the socio-economic category fixed by professional sociologists. The patrons are what they consume, not what they produce.

In the (pre-modernist) epistemological beginning was God, and God explained everything that there was to be explained and also explained all that could not be explained; a very effective explanatory system, one might think. However, this hermetically self-sealing land of explicable and acceptable ignorance took a radical turn for the better and worse when the Enlightenment thinkers decreed that the inexplicable was no longer acceptable, particularly when Kant took his own motto, *sapere aude* (dare to know), to its logical conclusion and located the authority to explain all within human rationality, as opposed to relying upon the external authority of God. Reason not religion was then the torch to light up the unknown. I'm tempted to say, 'The rest is history', but I won't; too late.

Actually the rest, according to Cooper and Burrell (1988), is two histories. One was concerned with employing reason to ever more complicated systems of modern organization, and we can see the results across various worlds, from Lenin's application of Taylorism to modernize the Soviet Union, through the growth of huge bureaucracies across the world (as predicted by Weber), to the rise of theoretical explanations of human behaviour rooted in rational action – economics and rational decision theory being two primary contenders. The other, and much less influential, history sought to enlighten humanity rather than control it, or explain how it operated in predictable ways. This was the tradition initiated by Kant himself, carried on – or carried off – by Karl Marx, and reconstructed anew today by the likes of Habermas (Held, 1980).

The 'end of history', as Fukuyama (1992) labels the defeat of the alternatives to capitalist democracy, is paradoxically another example of the 'grand narratives' that litter all modernist accounts of the world, according to Lyotard (1984). Modernism, accordingly, rests upon progressive notions of improvement through the application of science and rationality to the extent that the best of all possible worlds is, ultimately, achievable. Precisely what this world looks like is, of course, subject to considerable dispute but the whiggish approach to historical explanation remains at the heart of modernist enterprises. That millions of people have suffered or died at the hands of many modernist 'utopians' (see chapter 5) is often taken by postmodernists as a clear indication that the entire approach is premised upon morally ambiguous foundations (see Grint and Woolgar, 1995a). Since Nazi Germany, until then regarded by many as the most 'cultured' and scientifically advanced nation in the world, decided to murder 6 million Jews and many millions more Soviet citizens, on the grounds that they were scientifically proven to be sub-human, one is tempted to agree that the links between scientific, cultural and moral progress are few and that all such meta-narratives are suspect. The modernist counter-attack is to suggest that the Allies' defeat of Nazi Germany was itself only made possible because of the horror with which this same modern and humane world reacted to the barbaric Nazi atavism.

However, much of the current epistemological debate between modernist and postmodernist approaches – in so far as there is a debate rather than an agreement not to listen – centres less on politics than on the role played by language (see Cooper and Burrell, 1988; Hassard, 1994; N.J. Fox, 1993; Clegg, 1990, for useful discussions of the debate). For Lyotard (1984) the different discourses locked into the competing meta-narratives suggest that the legitimacy of any one discourse is restricted to a localized point in space and time – in effect what counts

as true depends upon where and when you are looking for it, and which version of the 'language game' is in operation.

From Derrida (1976, 1978) (and originally from Saussure's (1974) semiotic theory), postmodernist approaches adopt the term *différance* to suggest that language does not reflect the world but constitutes it. It constitutes it with regard not to the *essence* of the thing so constituted but to the difference between the thing and other things. To take an appropriate example, the word 'management' gains its meaning not by reflecting the essence of the group of people who manage but in relation to the difference between this group and the group that is managed by them – the 'managed'; one cannot make sense of the word 'manager' without simultaneously understanding the word 'managed' or 'non-manager' or 'employee'. It is, then, according to Derrida, the differences not the essences that we should concentrate on.

However, *différance* also implies that the meaning of any word is itself subject to different interpretations depending on the context, and so the move from essence to difference does not provide the solution to the problem of meaning. For instance, 'management' can mean a group of high-status individuals or a group of exploiters or a task or the butt of numerous jokes or the legitimation for one's rapid and ungracious exit from a nightclub.

Derrida also argues that logocentrism, the assumption that a transparent picture of the world can be secured through human thought, is problematic and that the question is not whether such a picture is true or not but how the claim to truth is constituted in and through discourse. We might, for instance, consider the way that claims to the truth in academic writings are legitimized as much through appeals to other authorities (Duck, D. (1982) and Flintstone, F. (2999 BC)) as through claims whose validity can be assessed by the reader (see if this works at home). This goes not just for qualitative studies (Atkinson, 1990) but for quantitative studies too (Woolgar, 1988a). Here, unless the reader can be bothered to read Atkinson and Woolgar (both good books actually), and then read the authorities that they cite in their own support, *ad infinitum*, you will have to take it on trust that these two works provide persuasive accounts of the alternative cases.

The critical point here is that language does not reflect the world but constitutes it. This need not mean that the world does not exist except in and through our constitution of it – as solipsism implies – but it does imply that whatever does exist we can only know by way of our constituting it through discourse. Thus, to misquote Levi-Strauss, the world cannot be known in the 'raw' – that is, in an untainted form – but only in the 'cooked', in a form mediated by language and human interpretation. Thus postmodernists pursue the 'deconstruction'

(Derrida, 1978) of claims to legitimacy to demonstrate the constructed, as opposed to the non-constructed (true, natural, objective), nature of the claim. Hence, when managers claim that they control organizations on the basis of their superior expertise or education, deconstructionists might question these claims by showing the extent to which their claims to expertise rest on their power to discipline those who question it.

The ambiguous nature of language suggests that interpretative effort is involved in making sense of the world and, following this, that the message provided by the sender need not necessarily be interpreted in an identical fashion by the receiver of the message. The flexibility that this suggests has often been held up by modernist critics as a sure sign of anarchic chaos within the heart of postmodernist approaches: if the reader writes the text, and if there are multiple readers, then all we are left with is a cacophony of contending voices. In effect, we are presented with a supermarket of interpretations and, in the absence of any consensus about what count as criteria for evaluating competing claims to the truth, any account is as good as any other. However, since these interpretations are not derived from, and do not embody, equal resources, it is unlikely that an egalitarian cacophony prevails and more likely that some voices are more equal than others – particularly those in positions of apparent power. If we want to know, then, why the orthodoxy prevails over the heresy, we should look not at the content of the argument but at the resources with which the arguments are articulated.

It is important to note here that such resources are not limited to the conventional resources that modernists might align on each side of a controversy to establish why one side won. It is not that more prestige leads to more material resources, and, since this provides for greater empirical research (the natural world can be observed more closely), it explains why research team X 'discovered' a particular star. Rather, the point is that the apparent increase in accuracy with which modernist research discovers the world is an effect of the limited discourses which provide a kernel of legitimacy for research, and within which only certain forms of knowledge can be ascribed 'truth'. In short, the canons of scientific legitimacy do not recognize heretical forms of research as valid since the methods and philosophy are invalidated by these same canons. Over time, though, as these paradigms (Kuhn, 1970) of legitimacy become increasingly tested and disputed, an alternative paradigm develops to displace the first, not to claim that the original was legitimate but only within a particular envelope of space and time, but to claim that it was always false, just as the new paradigm will always be true. For postmodernists, of course, the interesting point about the paradigm shift is not that we have progressed from error to truth, or

that we have swapped one form of falsehood for another, but to consider the ways the new orthodoxy legitimates itself through recourse to the 'facts' – an alternative form of representation. In contrast, postmodern writers on management are limited in how they can provide what conventionally counts as 'expertise' to organizations. Modernist consultants may proclaim that their expertise allows them to control the organization through increasingly accurate measurement, and subsequently prediction, of the structures, cultures, people and things that make up organizations. But postmodernists will look sceptically upon any such grand narrative that pretends to reveal the inner truths of any organization, and concentrate more upon the way consultants construct particular and persuasive renderings of the organization. Where the modernist consultant displays an apparently objective account of an organization that either is stable, or will become so through the execution of the consultant's recommendations, the postmodern sceptic looks at the ways in which an unstable array of matter is (temporarily) stabilized in and through the consultant's discourse.

What, exactly, does this mean in practice? When, for example, the consultant claims that performance related pay will boost morale and increase productivity, the consultant is involved in implementing the pay scheme and subsequently 'examining its effects': 'measuring' morale, perhaps through a survey, or monitoring absenteeism rates and 'measuring' output. Lo and behold, either the productivity increases or it does not – what could be clearer than this? Well, the postmodern sceptic worries about lots of things here. First, about whether there *is* a causal relationship between pay and productivity – can we really measure something as complicated as this? Doesn't this mean that we have to assume that nothing else has changed in the meantime? That, for instance, employees' moods don't boost productivity (whatever counts as a 'mood'); that new machinery or ways of working don't boost productivity; that the exchange rate changes don't boost productivity; that the threat of unemployment if the scheme fails doesn't boost productivity? Has quality been allowed to fall since everyone is now allegedly so concerned with boosting production? Can the increase be sustained once the CEO gets hooked on another scheme? Will the employees find ways around the scheme? And so on. In effect, what appears a simple causal relationship between pay and productivity only seems so because the consultant's discourse has persuaded the CEO that everything is controlled and explained; there are no woolly bits around the edges because the organization is like a machine that needs experts to fine-tune it; it is not, as Gergen (1992) suggests, just as likely to be like a cloud, billowing this way and that beyond anyone's apparent control. Indeed, it is, for the postmodernist, precisely because organiz-

ations are fabrications constructed to impose some rhetorical order on the disorder of life that they are 'uncontrollable'.

Postmodernist approaches also suggest a decentring of authority from internal to external. That is, for instance, what counts as a good manager or leader or product or employee rests not within the requisite body or thing but in the way the body or thing is evaluated by others. It is not that an objective set of criteria exists to measure these but that the criteria are a product of the social milieu.

The radical implications of this theoretical sojourn will not be pursued further here, in what might otherwise become a rather (more) arid and contorted metaphysical desert. Instead, I want to see what difference such an approach makes when it is deployed within certain areas of management theory and practice. The aim, then, is to use a constructivist approach as a heuristic – a learning tool – that may – or may not – facilitate our understanding of management. *If* the reader ends up by appreciating some rather different nuances and concerns about management then the book will have succeeded in its aim. The development of theory ought not to be regarded as the property of the faithful, to be protected from, and practised against, the unbeliever. If the history of the social sciences, and philosophy generally, implies anything it is that no approach appears to prevail across all space at any one time, or within any one space for all time. Scepticism rules OK! (Well, relatively speaking).

The following chapters take the reader on a journey that should lead her or him or it (assuming this can be 'read' by a genderless machine) to understand not just something about management and one particular sociological approach to it, but also about the *way* we come to understand what management is – and how the *way* we understand it has implications for *what* it is. For example, if we want to know *what* directors do we might consider asking them to specify, through interviews, diaries and questionnaires what they do. After the research fieldwork we would no doubt come to some conclusions about what it is that directors do. Of course, it may also be the case that the different methods generate different kinds of data. The conventional social science response would be to seek a triangulation of the evidence, in which the different data are juxtaposed and an attempt is made to triangulate the true position from two or more different points, as one might do in any orienteering exercise. This approach is firmly rooted in modernist and positivist assumptions that the data merely reflect the real world and, providing the methods are sufficiently scientific, the data will be compatible. Thus, in our directors' case, we survey a large (that is statistically significant) number of directors and the results suggest they all work fifteen-hour days and our diary data support this.

But suppose we now adopt anthropological methods. First, we will not have the resources to observe these 'tribes' of directors so we will have to limit the number of cases to a handful. Now suppose our observations suggest that, although these directors are in their offices for fifteen hours a day, they are not 'working' all this time but socializing or organizing golf or sleeping off executive lunches or plotting the downfall of their CEOs. These data might still be compatible with the quantitative data from the survey and diaries; but suppose the directors deny the anthropologists' results and claim that what the anthropologist calls 'socializing' and 'organizing golf' is a critical function of the way business operates. Are these directors working hard for the company or just enjoying themselves at company expense? Who is to say? Now this is the crunch: *who* has the legitimate authority to pronounce upon the non-triangulated results? On the one (modernist) hand, since there is self-evidently only one truth a decision has to be made as to which party is mistaken about what directors actually do. But what if we cannot decide upon this because no one can stand above the debate, that is, there are no agreed criteria that we can use which will pronounce one side to have told the truth and the other to be mistaken? Could it be that the directors do actually believe that they are working for the company in all their activities and that the anthropologists deny this, and that what is actually going on is not something we are going to be able to decide in any objective or neutral way? In short, could it be that what the directors are doing depends on which approach one uses and which expert one believes?

The rest of this book is an attempt to deploy this form of constructivist argument in an array of different management fields to demonstrate its heuristic potential and its limitations. It is not, therefore, an extended review of postmodernism, nor does it attempt to steer a path that holds close to what might be a postmodern orthodoxy. I do, however, intend to pursue a generally constructivist line that adopts some elements of postmodernism (see Grint and Woolgar (1995b) for another attempt).

The following chapter is a historical review of the development of management traditions, set against the background of European wars, in which national identities coagulate in the venom that seeps between hostile nations. Chapter 3, 'Mimetic Pyrophobes' (fire-fighting copycats), explores what managers appear to do – and why they appear to do what they do. In particular, I consider the historical significance of the education of managers (or lack of it) in creating a tradition of fire-fighting that appears, at least in Britain, to have continued repeating itself since its origins in the industrial revolution. In chapter 4, a current management fixation, appraisals, is used to root the text in a practical issue and to demonstrate both the problems with conventional

approaches and the possibilities inspired by constructivist alternatives. The practical application of constructivist ideas is further pursued in chapter 5 where the prospect of securing radical organizational change is configured through Bloch's (1986) 'Principle of Hope', an argument for the necessarily utopian premise of all radical change. Business process reengineering (BPR) is one such form of radical change, and this chapter takes a close look at BPR as an example of the fads and fashions that seem to keep management in a constant state of turmoil. The aim of this chapter is to consider the extent to which the 'success' of reengineering can be construed through an external focus on related ideas beyond management, rather than through the 'objective' utility of the ideas encompassed by reengineering itself. This externalist approach is also adopted for chapter 6 on leadership, which is examined in some detail to throw some uncomfortable ideas onto the tracks of the leadership gravy train. This chapter is especially concerned to explore the logical problem of investing individuals with leadership qualities, notably charismatic leadership qualities, when leadership appears to be essentially dependent upon the *post hoc* whim of the followers not the leaders themselves. The relational implications of this are further pursued in the following chapter on management and culture. Starting from traditional assumptions about culture, in which culture is an association of farmers, tools, seeds and the natural elements, I go on to analyse the way culture has been progressively reduced to human ideas and practices in which the human takes an unprecedentedly superordinate position above and beyond the world of the non-human. The circle is completed through contemporary theoretical developments in which divisions between human and non-human are radically challenged.

The theoretical issues become yet more challenging in chapter 8 which pushes the journey into more difficult waters by moving between what might be considered as the Charybdis of gender and the Scylla of technology. The first generates a whirlpool of moral and political questions for constructivism; the second appears to be a particularly hard rock to crack. At the termination of this section of the journey through a sociology of management I attempt to demonstrate how both the whirlpool and the rock can be crossed – with difficulty – but crossed nevertheless. The penultimate chapter halts the journey into the heart of darkness in an appropriately Cimmerian world of trench warfare in the First World War to examine methods of control under extreme forms of management. This is not to wander off the path of management but to consider just how much control and freedom the managers of war and the managed of war have under such conditions. *A fortiori*, if the 'poor bloody infantry' are free to do otherwise than 'go over the top' then we have to reconsider the extent to which management

control is based in a fatalism that is just one of many possible forms of action. In summary, our journey to the heart of darkness begins to draw to a close with a recognition of freedom and therefore self-responsibility; we are, it appears, fated to freedom. The final chapter reflects upon the journey, especially the methods, and poses some uncomfortable questions for the writer of the journey as well as the traveller: just how much 'management' of the traveller is involved in 'understanding' this management journey?

2

The Black Ships: The Historical Development of British Management

Introduction

In 1852 a meteor streaked across the Japanese sky and, shortly afterwards, four American navy ships sailed into Tokyo harbour: the 'black ships' had arrived. To the Japanese, virtually isolated from the rest of the world for over 250 years, the black ships represented a double threat: they were alien invaders of the Japanese homeland that had remained 'unsoiled' by foreigners for centuries; but they were also aliens within advanced alien technologies that the Japanese had little, if any, knowledge of. When the Mongol hordes had threatened Japan in 1274 and again in 1281 the invaders had been expelled by the actions of the Japanese soldiers and the intervention of *Kami Kaze*, the 'divine wind' that twice destroyed the Mongol/Korean fleet (R. Marshall, 1993). When European sailors made contact with Japan in the late sixteenth century, after a brief dalliance with some of the ideas and technologies, such as firearms, ship-building and navigation, the Tokugawa shogunate expelled the foreigners. In 1852, however, the *Gaijin* (foreigners) posed an immediate threat. The previous responses to external threats had been to expel them, and to maintain the boundaries. The response in 1852 was different: this time the Japanese decided not to expel the foreigners immediately, though this would have been possible if difficult to achieve, but to learn from them in order to resist them. Thus the Japanese changed their strategy of resistance from an expulsive to a mimetic form. The first was rooted in fears for the imminent destruction

of a culturally superior people by a barbarian horde. The second was rooted in assumptions about the imminent destruction of a culturally superior people by a barbarian horde armed with sophisticated technologies. The black ships represented not just the barbarian but the technologically sophisticated barbarian. In what follows I want to consider the extent to which the development of British management can be read in a similar light.

Like Japan's (and probably every other country's), Britain's cultural heritage has been one commonly grounded in notions of superiority. Certainly by the middle of the nineteenth century the British lion appeared dominant: its army patrolled 25 per cent of the globe and its navy ruled a large proportion of the sea waves. But within another quarter of a century the proverbial black ships had arrived, this time in the form of American and German competition. The British response to the perceived alien threat was to take the first Japanese route: to expel the alien by operating closed markets and the *status quo ante* – to do otherwise would have been to suggest that British superiority was either waning or based on a problematic heritage. As in Japan, the response seemed to work: for a further century Britain appeared to survive and prosper, but only in absolute not relative terms, for the foreign competition became stronger, as did 'the other'. Not really until the 1970s does British management appear to have considered the second route. By this time the black ships had become so threatening that a change of strategy pushed a (still) reluctant management into the mimetic mode. From then on, a small but increasingly popular move to copy the black ships developed. At different times the German, American and Japanese have all been held up as the system to guaranteed success. Whether this is the case or not remains to be seen.

In what follows I begin by considering the general origins of management before concentrating on the development of a particular British form that I highlight against the backdrop of events at the beginning of the industrial revolution and during the wars with France. Taking the constructions of management traditions as a flake from the construction of national traditions, I spend some time linking the heroic figure of Wellington to his equivalent in the world of industry to see the extent to which the latter stereotypes mirror the former. The chapter then moves on to look at the clash between different social classes and interests, focusing in particular on the relationship between the aristocracy and the industrial capitalists. Finally, the focus becomes narrower still to examine the significance of the classic British company form, family capitalism. But let me begin at the beginning, with the origins of management.

Historical origins of management

The word 'management' is derived from the Italian *maneggiare*, meaning to control or to train, particularly applied to the management of horses; the Italian was itself rooted in the Latin *manus*, meaning hand. 'Herding cats' rather than horses is the image that springs to mind sometimes but management as an activity goes back much further than Ben-Hur's attempts to manage his team of chariot horses around the arena, literally at break-neck speed. The Sumerians had a system of account management that Foucault would have appreciated in its conflation of power/knowledge, though probably the most spectacular instances of large-scale management in the ancient world are embodied in the pyramids, or in the British case, in Stonehenge. These construction projects required a complex organizational system that could only have functioned through some form of effective management, though precisely what that may have been is disputed (Mendelssohn, 1974).

Management has also existed in relation to the management of war, a phenomenon which appears to be as old as humankind, and which has also required some form of managerial co-ordination. From the eighth-century BC Assyrian charioteers, whose success appears to have been dependent upon the successful management of a formidable array of logistics, to the considerably earlier siege of Jericho, and up to the recent war in the Gulf, the management of war has been, at least partly, the war between managers (Keegan, 1993).

A third source for the origins of management lies in the early religious institutions, particularly the Christian monastic organizations, like the Benedictine monasteries whose life from the fifth century onwards was apparently minutely controlled by the regulations created by St Benedict and enforced through the religious hierarchy. The requirement to keep the size of the institution to a group of around twelve generally discouraged the development of anything like the managerial bureaucracies of later and larger organizations; nevertheless, unlike the rival Cistercian monks, the Benedictines employed lay workers and hence the utility of self-imposed discipline would probably have been considerably reduced and a management system necessary (Applebaum, 1992: 195–209; B. Harvey, 1993).

However, it is to the fourth antecedent, industry, that many would turn in the search for the origins of contemporary management. The original guilds, in which craftworkers banded together to control labour supply, wages, product prices, quality and quantity, had some forms of management, though they were both small-scale and deeply embedded into the fabric of the community – to the extent that deciding where the

rights of the guild started and the realm of the family ended would probably have been the subject of some dispute. It is no coincidence that medieval homes would probably have had only one 'chair', occupied by the family head, in a (board)room where a single 'board' served as the table for meals and other activities (such as board games).

Medieval guilds, which had spread throughout all the major European cities by the twelfth century, were 'total institutions' and not really corporate actors that were legally distinct from the people who worked within them. Indeed, Kieser (1989) suggests that such guilds were generally not innovative and seldom functionally specialized to the extent that we might consider certain individuals as performing what are taken as managerial activities. Rather, they were controlled by a 'master' who supervised a 'novice' until such time as the novice created a 'masterpiece' and became a 'journeyman', that is a craftworker paid by the day (from the French '*Journée*' and not the English 'journey'). These guilds were themselves moral economies (see Grint, 1991), rather than market-oriented institutions, where honour, custom and tradition were more important than increasing sales or profits. Indeed, accumulating wealth as an end in itself may well have seemed extraordinarily irrational. Kieser quotes one example of the role of the moral economy from a shoemaker's guild in Schmiedeberg, in Germany, where a master shoemaker was expelled from the guild for picking up a nail used by the local executioner to re-attach his victims' heads after execution (1989: 552). In several mining areas, in both Germany and England, the miners themselves ran their affairs as collectives without any apparent form of superordinate authority, even to the extent of administering their own law – so that Devon miners would frequently 'seize and beat up the king's bailiffs ... and hold them in prison pending the payment of a ransom' (Lewis, 1924: 36, quoted in Gimpel, 1992: 99). Self-management, then, has a very long history.

However, the monopolistic restrictions of the guilds may well have stimulated the development of functionally specialized institutions in which the producers were separated from the controllers – a development requiring some form of management. By the fourteenth century the division of labour was well under way in some areas: four hundred years before Adam Smith (re)'invented' the idea (which was still some time after Odysseus had undertaken such divided labour), Florentine cloth production had been divided into twenty-six separate operations. But if the division of labour was not an invention of the industrial revolution neither was managing recalcitrant labour: in 1345 York Minster's works' manager found himself at the receiving end of a damning indictment in which absenteeism, stolen materials, unfit workers, defective building and rotting machinery were just some of the

noted problems (Gimpel, 1992: 106–8; see also Sonenscher, 1989). Should we still remain convinced that the nineteenth-century habits of work avoidance and intricate and intractable wage negotiations, so vividly depicted in the autobiographical work of T. Wright (1867), are the responsibility of the industrial revolution, we would do well to return to the fourteenth century where the problem of day wages – where the workers stopped work as soon as the supervisor's back was turned – was matched by the complexity of the system: at Caernarvon Castle in 1304 the payroll includes 53 stonemasons on 17 different daily rates of pay (Gimpel, 1992: 109).

In short, management has a history as long as human history; one might even say that humanity's distinction from other animal groups is rooted not just in the ability to use a language to communicate, and to use and develop technology, but in the ability to marshal other humans into complex organizations that, through co-ordinated action, can achieve far more than any single human could ever achieve. In other words, humans are essentially a managed species. A further implication of this is that the kind of problems thrown up in management also have a very long history; from managing military supplies to managing hunting and farming, to mobilizing a workforce and developing quality control mechanisms, management has always been, at least in part, 'just one damn thing after another'. But just as military and religious management has differed widely, even with organizations using apparently similar technologies and knowledge, so too, has business management. In the next section I want to consider the extent to which British management has an historical thread that remains relatively unchanging across time, and the extent to which this depends upon assumptions about what 'the other' is doing; what the black ships represent.

Wellingtonian management: managing the formation of national identity

In this section I will be mainly concerned with the development of British management, but the development of an archetypal British manager is critically dependent upon the differences between this archetype and 'the other', whether that other is French or American or German or Japanese. I will start by doubting whether such cultures are manifestations of some deeply rooted, and mysteriously evolved, element of the national psyche and by doubting that cultures are unchanging in space or time. We are probably all aware of national stereotypes and we probably all know many individuals from other countries who simply do not appear to fit the stereotype. That national stereotypes are