CONSIDERING MANAGEMENT EDUCATION: INSIGHTS FROM CRITICAL MANAGEMENT STUDIES ────────

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Critical management studies (CMS) is a branch of management theory that critiques our intellectual and social practices, questions the "natural order" of institutional arrangements, and engages in actions that support challenges to prevailing systems of domination. Such an agenda has broad implications not only for the business world and the way that it is governed but also for our academic and intellectual traditions. It means a commitment to questioning the presuppositions and values that guide institutional, managerial, and intellectual practices; the ways in which we create and structure our social and organizational realities; and how we relate to others. Furthermore, it means thinking about the beliefs and practices underlying how we constitute knowledge about the world.

In addition to urging others (such as managers) to be critical, CMS maintains that it is also essential to turn those critical faculties on our own practices as academics and educators. In other words, not only do managers need to free themselves "from the limits of an acritical profession" (Jun, 1994, p. 26) but academics also need to do so. We need to consider the modes of domination that may exist within our own institutions and our own classrooms. In this way, we can better identify with the issues involved in "critical management" and enact its values. These ideas formed the organizing premises for

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the education stream at the 2001 Second International Critical Management Studies Conference, Manchester, United Kingdom, from which the papers in this special issue are drawn.

The organization of CMS in regular conferences in the United Kingdom and the United States is comparatively recent, having begun just more than 5 years ago. But the groundwork for this development occurred 20 years earlier with the genesis of the labor process annual international conferences in Britain and with books that arose from those deliberations (e.g., Knights, Willmott, & Collinson, 1985). Although these labor process conferences continue, a rather larger constituency has gathered around CMS, not in the least due to the growth of business schools and, in the postradical 1980s, the drift of a number of "left-thinking" sociologists to these institutions. As more fully described in the domain statement of the Academy of Management's CMS workshop,

> CMS serves as a forum within the academy for the expression of views critical of established management practices and the established social order. Our premise is that structural features of contemporary society such as the profit imperative, patriarchy, racial inequality, and ecological irresponsibility often turn organizations into instruments of domination and exploitation. Driven by a shared desire to change this situation, we aim in our research, teaching, and practice to develop critical interpretations of management and society and to generate radical alternatives. Our critique seeks to connect the practical shortcomings in management and individual managers to the demands of a socially divisive and ecologically destructive system within which managers work.

CMS positions itself between present practices and future possibilities; it offers opportunities to reflect on and question the implications of a broad range of issues confronting all types of organizations, including both public and private businesses and educational institutions. Interestingly, it is here that there exists a point of convergence and meaningful contact for management teachers and their practitioner cohorts insofar as both are subject to similar managerial and market pressures of accountability and "customer" service. Thus, a critical self-reflection on the politics of these shifting demands on academic and business practice can be engaging and enlightening.

Throughout their history, modern institutions of higher education have been caught in a tension between the ideals of a classical pedagogy, in which knowledge and learning are ends in themselves, and the demands of government and business for utilitarian relevance. These expectations are not unfamiliar to business and management educators. Management education has always struggled with "structural ambiguity" (Light, 1983), resulting from the dualisms represented in its academic imperative (as scholars in the uni-

versity) and from commerce (as trainers of future managers). Indeed, the legitimacy for management education is historically derived from these two arenas, each adhering to different, often-conflicting criteria (Forray & Mir, 1994). As management educators then, we may consider ourselves at the nexus of a wider contemporary shift between society and academe, both as harbingers of change in the larger educational enterprise and as those also affected by its implications.

In the contemporary framework of utilitarianism, a precarious and perhaps unhealthy compromise is often made, at least for the student "customers" for whom relevance may be accomplished through certification rather than learning. At the undergraduate level, such certification and associated grading acts as a convenient and cost-effective selection device for business. But at postgraduate and postexperience levels, although still a condition of conformity, certification is not always sufficient, especially where the teaching is of low quality or retains the conventional undergraduate form of "lecturing at" students (Currie & Knights, 2000). MBA students that have an experience of management, for example, may demand a different sort of relevance or at least a stimulating and challenging experience.

The relevance issue at the postgraduate and/or postexperience level of demand is invariably handled by simulating real-life business situations through case studies (e.g., the Harvard method) and role play or experiential exercises. These seek to render the more abstract and theoretical issues of management more accessible through participative teaching methods (Currie & Knights, 2000). But a more challenging experience can be generated by introducing a critical agenda in which students' sense of themselves as morally sensitive and politically alert participants with a capacity for self-reflection can be appropriated as a teaching resource (P. Prasad & Caproni, 1997; Roberts, 1996). Moreover, a critical approach to management practice is intellectually demanding insofar as it requires thinking outside the box—a necessary precondition for managers who seek to be creative, innovative, and flexible in rapidly changing business worlds. Consequently, even on the demand side, a critical approach to management learning can secure some justification.

On the supply side, critical management education secures its impetus from a diverse range of experiences and histories. Although the mainstream in management education remains managerialist, seeking to offer solutions to problems defined unreflectively by practitioners, this approach is anathema to critical management teachers. We engage in academic life to change ways of thinking about business practice and to move away from technorationality to more critical and morally responsible actions. Some are social scientists manqué that have entered management education because

the labor market is looser in this rapidly expanding sphere of academia, whereas others abandoned management practice to pursue alternative intellectual and social interests. As career academics, critical management educators are more concerned with our reputation among peers, whom we impress through research and publishing, than our standing with management practitioners. Thus, critical management teachers are driven by moral and political questions, intellectual and social scientific interest, and professional careers.

In part, critical management academics defend their approach through resorting to the classical pedagogy that knowledge is an end in itself and not simply an instrumental means to some other utilitarian end, especially the commercial profits that reinforce the social inequalities in capitalist societies. However, this "purist" position is increasingly difficult to sustain in contemporary climates where subjective well-being has come to be associated with material affluence and economic success. Lives in general, and educational institutions in particular are increasingly permeated by the economic imperatives of material and symbolic competition and the "success ethic" (Berger, 1970). With the rise of the New Right and neoliberal economics in late 20th century western democracies, the market place gradually became the dominant model for all aspects of life. Accordingly, the contemporary language of higher education has come to be one of production and consumption, signaling a fundamental change to its purpose—educating the "good employee" rather than the "knowledgeable citizen." Through considerations of accountability to various stakeholders—not the least of whom are those who hold the purse string (i.e., government and students)—customer satisfaction is rendered a control on the demand side of education. Traditionally noneconomic institutions such as universities are thus forced to renegotiate their social identity. Here, we have come full circle; the stakeholder customer in management education, especially at the postgraduate level, is rather more demanding.

Although frequently paraded as collegial, the rather individualistic culture of contemporary universities has left academics vulnerable to the increasing infiltration of market and utilitarian modes of accountability. In the United Kingdom, this took the extreme form of a regular research assessment exercise followed by a quality control of teaching. Although there has been some resistance to the latter, on the whole, academics have generally taken the medicine lying down. In the United States, the tenure and promotion system along with accreditation programs such as those of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business are sufficiently rigorous to maintain control, and the dominance of quantitative approaches to research seemingly satisfies the unreflective business demand for "hard" data. Recently, however, a

backlash against increasingly abstract modes of analysis met with considerable criticism and, in particular, questioned whether the MBA was teaching the skills necessary for a managerial role (Linder & Smith, 1992; Mintzberg, 1989).

> MBAs are generally proficient in accounting, finance and analytical skills . . . however, the biggest problem with MBAs is their lack of supervisory skills, communication abilities and leadership qualities . . . I have been frustrated with business schools that don't provide their students with better training in human relations, communications and other management skills. (Lataif & Mintzberg, 1992, p. 25)

Hatch (1998) has also argued that there is a polarized culture in which academics focus on abstract theories and business people on practical actions and results. Yet, critical management teachers regard this scenario somewhat differently, arguing that theory is a problem when it is entirely abstracted from the everyday life of business, the economy, and society. This decontextualization occurs when everything is converted into mathematical or statistical formulae. However, only indirectly through participative pedagogic methods are critical management teachers concerned with improving students' human relations and communications skills. Their greater concern is to offer up management issues, including for example those of accountability and empowered responsibility, for critical examination. In so doing, management practice is redefined as a contested terrain (Edwards, 1979), and its morally and politically charged character is no longer marginalized.

In a previous *Journal of Management Education* special issue, a series of provocative articles described the ways in which a small group of educators introduced critical theory into their management classrooms (P. Prasad & Caproni, 1997). They challenged us to "help students grasp the assumptions of a power-induced, politically sustained, socially constructed world" (Frost, 1997, p. 361). In much the same spirit, we offer the following four articles. However, unlike the classroom focus of the previous special issue, our challenge to management educators is to consider the field of management education and their role in it as power induced, politically sustained, and socially constructed. Furthermore, as critical theorists, we offer these articles as a form of praxis—an inspiration for action.

In the first article, Chris Grey questions the purposes of business schools and challenges the commonly held assumption that we are engaged in producing effective managers. He argues instead that the ideological and socialization imperatives of management education suggest that what we are doing is primarily concerned with status and legitimation. He encourages us to give

voice to some of the messiness and suffering that characterizes management practice as a means of overcoming this narrow ideological framework.

In the contribution by Carole Elliott and Michael Reynolds, the authors explore the relationship between the practicing manager and the management teacher. In particular, they focus on the process through which ideas about management are developed and they question the privileging of academic research over ideas developed through professional practice.

In the third article, Roberto Gutiérrez raises some provocative questions about student-teacher power relations and offers a way of incorporating ideas from critical theory into our teaching practice. His central premise is that just as the business world can be seen as a product of cultural, ideological, and asymmetrical power relations, so can the classroom. He suggests that as "critical" management educators, we need to be self-reflexive and practice what we preach, to think about our assumptions, and to explore ways of encouraging students to participate in learning in more democratic ways. The article highlights some of the issues and problems involved in bringing these ideas to the classroom.

The last article, by Scott Taylor, Richard Thorpe, and Simon Down, draws on some empirical research in smaller organizations to address the issue of how management secures legitimacy through the use of a range of educational or quasi-educational materials. In these organizations, managers' formal education was insufficient on its own as a means of gaining the respect of employees. Generally, legitimacy was negotiated on the basis of a cultural competence embedded in local expertise and formal knowledge.

In summary, the articles in this special issue take a critical stance to unsettle some of our commonly held assumptions regarding the purposes, practices, and relationships within management education. Each author calls on us to think about how we construct realities and relationships within management education and offers ideas about how we may enact a critical perspective. Across each of the articles, the message is clear—if we take the ideas offered by CMS into consideration, then we must do more than simply redesign our courses to incorporate critical theory or critical thinking. We need to, as A. Prasad and Cavanaugh (1997) suggested, "be actively engaged in the much needed search for fundamental alternatives to current ways of organizing and 'doing things'" (p. 315). In this special issue, we turn that critique and call for engagement upon ourselves. Indeed, CMS is not only an intellectual exercise—it also involves a rethinking and reshaping of practice. This stance requires a degree of self-reflexivity on our own part (Chia, 1996; Cunliffe, 2002), for how can we ask our students to be moral and critical practitioners if we are not?

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