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The Unmaking of Management? Change and Continuity in British Management in the 1990s

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In the late 1980s, a series of reports—notably, “The Making of Managers” by Charles Handy—outlined a development path for management in the U.K. This was to be based on the development of an education and training base and the model set by leading corporations. A decade later, this paper reviews current trends in managerial work and employment against the expectations of the late 1980s. In doing so, it distinguishes between the objective condition of British management and its institutionalized meaning within wider British society. It argues that recent accounts of changes in managerial work and employment have focused solely on incremental changes in the empirical domain and have neglected important discursive shifts in the way management is understood and enacted within organizations. These shifts have been catalyzed by the emergence of a series of organizational initiatives—first, Total Quality Management (TQM) and, latterly, lean production and Business Process Reengineering (BPR)—which aim to systematically deconstruct management by emphasizing worker empowerment, delayering, downsizing, and the redistribution of managerial functions. In short, initiatives such as these are contributing to the “unmaking of management.” Managerial groups are subject to intensification and polarization, while managerial practices are diffused throughout the work process.

KEY WORDS: management; Britain; change; downsizing; discourse.

INTRODUCTION

In 1987, Charles Handy produced a report entitled “The Making of Managers,” which pointed to the vital need to improve education and training for management in Britain. The following decade, however, has seen a number of trends which seem to challenge the conception of management outlined in the Handy report. This paper aims to explore those trends and

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to establish whether they ultimately amount to the unmaking of management as we currently understand it.

In examining the existing literature on this question, it quickly becomes apparent that there is a widening gulf between popular perceptions and the findings of academic research. In the popular literature, British management is generally seen to be threatened by developments in global competition and technology. In "Managing Without Management," for example, Koch and Godden (1996) describe the role of "information power" and "customer power" in eliminating managerial roles. Their view that management is a threatened species finds support from the widespread publicity given to downsizing and delayering exercises in British firms. Jacques (1994), for instance, argues that recent waves of large-scale redundancies in middle and senior layers of the hierarchy are not cyclical effects but reflect more profound changes in the organizational role of management:

1. The command and control model led to bloated management structures.
2. Rigid hierarchies are too cumbersome when confronted by global competition.
3. IT facilitates communication—allowing easier horizontal communications.
4. The need for faster communications means reducing vertical communications.

However, in contrast to this widespread perception of management as a beleaguered group, empirical studies tend to show stability in the role and scope of managerial occupations. For example, research by Dopson and Stewart (1990, 1993) suggests a good deal of continuity, and even expansion, in the roles played by middle management:

Our limited evidence suggests that the gloomy predictions are at least an exaggeration as they do not apply to some middle managers in some organizations. We found that a slimmer middle management in a time of rapid change has a more important role to play than before. (Dopson & Stewart, 1990, p. 15)

This contrast might be read simply as an argument for the superiority of empirical research over reportage. However, in this paper, I wish to argue that the contrast reflects a deeper theoretical problem about the nature of management which is not reducible to an empirical question about the numbers and roles of managers. In short, the question addressed by Dopson and Stewart—"What's really happening to middle management?"—may be more difficult to answer than it first appears. This is because in modern British society the significance of management extends some way beyond the roles played at the workplace by those formally designated as managers. Rather, its significance also encompasses a much wider range of groups

and institutions whose attitude toward, and assimilation of, management norms and practices is arguably just as important an index of its rise and fall. Only by addressing the latter can we fully appreciate the nature of developments such as TQM, teamworking, and empowerment, and their dispersal of managerial practices to groups outside the formal ambit of management.

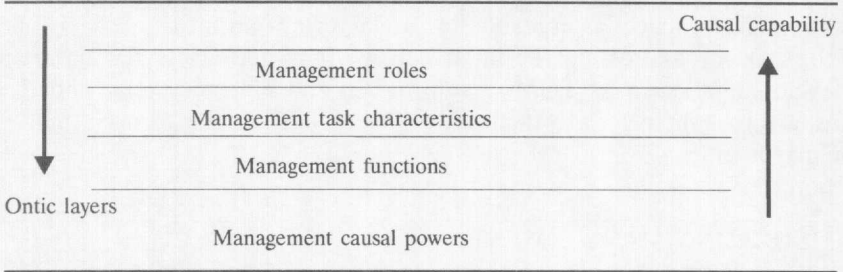
THEORIZING MANAGEMENT

This paper addresses the contrast between social perceptions and academic surveys by outlining, in a propositional way, an alternative view of British management to the one which underpins empirical surveys of the kind described above. This alternative view highlights the interplay between the meanings which management carries within British society and the way management is practiced within organizations. By focusing on what I will describe as the “institutionalized meaning” of management, this view is able to account for the apparent contradiction between widespread perceptions of threat or uncertainty and research findings of continuity.

Before outlining this alternative approach, its relevance can be usefully defined by highlighting some of the limitations of existing accounts of management in Britain. At the risk of oversimplifying a number of studies of widely differing scope and ambition, such accounts can be broadly characterized as falling into two different schools of thought: one “empiricist” and the other “essentialist.”

The work of the empiricist school centers on the question “What do managers do?” Note, this does not ask *why* do managers do what they do—this is the focus of the essentialists. Instead, the empiricists (e.g., Mintzberg, 1973; Kotter, 1982; Stewart, 1970) take the existence of management as a given and concern themselves primarily with the visible behaviors displayed by managers in different settings. In this perspective, any evidence of change can be derived unproblematically from empirical data on managerial roles and behaviors.

The richness of description provided by the empiricists has to be set alongside the restrictive assumptions built into their work. Is it really the case, for example, that change in management can be identified simply by mapping changes in the numbers and roles of those designated as managers? This not only conflates management practices with management roles, but also glosses over the deeper functions which management performs within organizations. Certainly, managerial skills and behaviors may be situationally and technologically contingent but this does not mean that management is amenable to the same kind of empirical analysis as a more specialized occupational group such as, say, printers. While declining num-

Table I. Analysis of the "Ontic Layers" of Management^a

^aAdapted from Tsoukas (1994).

bers and shrinking skills in the latter group can be reasonably seen as demonstrating an occupation in decline, it is hard to see how data on managerial jobs could furnish equivalent evidence for the practice of management.

This problem with empiricism shows the ambiguous effects of the relationship between surface behaviors and underlying functions in the study of management. As Hales (1986) notes: "Few modern phenomena so patently pervasive and systematically scrutinized as 'management' have been so beset by ambiguity, confusion and, at times, obfuscation" (p. 1). One approach to resolving this ambiguity has been developed by "essentialist" writers, that is, writers who attempt to define "the essence of management." Like Victorian explorers searching for the source of the Nile (Watson, 1994), such accounts assume that penetrating the mystique of management will expose its intrinsic character (Willmott, 1984).

The main aim of these accounts is to relate the microlevel behavior of managers to the structural and functional imperatives of management. They seek to show the links between the visible "practices" of management and its underlying "functions" such as controlling labor and managing the contradictions between social production and private appropriation (Hales, 1986). Depending on their particular interests, writers expose a greater or lesser number of levels of analysis in arriving at the essence of management. In a recent contribution, for example, Tsoukas (1994), presents a particularly deep analysis based on four "ontic layers" which he terms "roles," "task characteristics," "functions," and "causal powers" (see Table I). The deepest layer is "causal powers" which derives from management's place in the capitalist industrial structure. These powers encompass the ability to control the transformation of labor power into labor, the ability to elicit active cooperation from subordinates, and the drive toward efficiency and effectiveness. Depending on circumstances, these causal powers enable the exercise of management functions such as as planning, organizing, and controlling. In turn, these functions by their organizational and discretionary

nature help to shape management task characteristics such as interdependence, and the concern with both continuity and innovation. Finally, such characteristics inform the actual roles such as resource allocation, disturbance handling, and entrepreneurship which are performed by managers.

Although this kind of essentialist account is an important corrective to empiricism, its analysis is based on a mechanical and ontological model of the relationships between different levels of causation. Management is said to be constituted by hierarchical relationships between core and surface elements, such that actions at one level are explained very largely in terms of the influence—that is, either the imperatives or the contradictions—of a deeper level. This kind of essentialism is arguably no more adequate than the empirical approach to understanding change in British management. This is partly because, despite its neo-Marxist origins, it is deeply conservative in its appreciation of such change. An emphasis on structural continuity means that any but the most radical changes are likely to be dismissed as merely cosmetic—“rhetoric rather than reality” being the phrase liberally applied by writers to studies of innovations such as TQM & HRM (Human Resource Management) (Sisson, 1994; Blyton and Turnbull, 1992). Moreover, this privileging of structural continuity over task and role-related change also disregards the cultivated reflexivity of management practice (Schon, 1983; Giddens, 1994). Thus, the essentialists’ emphasis on the inner congruence of levels of analysis discounts the possibility of management being reconstituted through its own self-knowledge and projected perceptions. This is the charge which Willmott (1996) levels at Tsoukas’ work. It fails, he says, to make the connection between “the generation of knowledge about management . . . and its production within relations of power where, arguably, it is partly constitutive of the ‘industrial structure’ of workplace relations” (p. 325). This not only highlights the role of discourse in constituting management but also suggests that its impact derives from the circulation of such knowledge among non-managerial groups such as workers and customers as well as among managers themselves.

Despite their apparent differences then, both the empiricist and the essentialist approaches seem to share certain assumptions about the nature of management. First, they neglect the meanings carried by management. It would be impossible to convey the whole array of such meanings since they depend on the perceptions of different observers. However, one central tenet is the notion that the world is manageable—that is, amenable to prediction and instrumental control. A related view is the proposition that social problems are not the result of intractable political conflict but are ultimately amenable to pragmatic resolution. Second, these approaches also share an emphasis on management as an *effect* rather than a causal force in its own right. Thus, from a neo-Marxist standpoint, management is seen

as the "containment of contradictions" (Tomlinson, 1982), whereas more behaviorally-oriented studies tend to view managerial actions in terms of situational contingencies.

Overall, despite their differences both empiricist and essentialists seem to focus on one dimension of management. To adapt an old Marxist term, their studies seem to deal exclusively with the realm of "management-in-itself." They show relatively little concern for the wider mobilization of management ideas and norms in the rest of British society. Management is seen very largely as a structurally or empirically determined entity without the power to shape its own destiny. This orientation probably reflects their concern to understand the role of management at the workplace, a role defined primarily in terms of the actions of managers themselves and the structures which empower that action. Much less attention is paid to the assimilation of management norms by a wide range of social constituencies and its implications for managerial practice.

Since "The Making of Managers" report, however, it has become possible to identify a number of factors, including the report itself, which prompt a reevaluation of this focus. For example, the 1980s saw a major upsurge in business education in the U.K. The number of MBA courses offered increased from a handful to more than a hundred in the space of a decade. "Business studies" became the most popular undergraduate program, and many new business schools were established. Thus, the art of management became increasingly implicated in extended intellectual and cultural networks (Gibbons et al., 1994). These not only amplified management's role in the workplace but also reworked the knowledge-base which helped to constitute that role. Networks comprising academic institutions such as business schools together with consultants and other knowledge vendors helped to diffuse managerial norms and concepts to a much broader range of institutions and settings.

Addressing the dispersal of management norms and thinking across these social and institutional networks demands a change in focus. From an exclusive concern with "management-in-itself," the focus shifts to what can by extension be termed "management-for-itself" within wider British society. This term takes us beyond the workplace and formal managerial roles to the global impact of management as a touchstone of social practice. It is not, therefore, despite its connotations, an invitation to a simplistic class-based analysis of management. Although social legitimation and class interests certainly play a role here (Anthony, 1977), this is qualified by the comparative failure of the managerial class project in Britain (Reed & Anthony, 1992). Rather, management-for-itself can be defined more simply as the shadow which management casts over wider British society. In such an account, Plato may be a better guide than Marx since this shadow is

cast as much by the *idea* of management and its cultural expressions as by its actual role within organizations. The sphere of management-for-itself is thus broadly defined by diffusion of the management ideal. It not only includes the role of educational institutions in promoting that ideal but also the willingness of a range of other institutions—public sector organizations, voluntary bodies, and so on—to internalize it and build their own norms and practices around it (Ranson & Stewart, 1994; Willmott, 1995).

Of course, to distinguish between management-in-itself and management-for-itself is to make a purely analytic distinction. To suggest otherwise would mean accepting the essentialist assumption that the practice of management can be distinguished from its mystique. In contrast, I would argue that the mystique is important to the way management is enacted within organizations. More generally, I will argue later that one of the key points in understanding current patterns of change is that management practice is mutually constituted by both the functions it encompasses and the meanings it mobilizes. As a starting point, however, it is useful to identify some of the key changes in British management under these separate headings.

MANAGEMENT-IN-ITSELF

In strictly empirical terms, the numbers, location, and functions of managers are highly dependent on the economic and technological context. At the time of the Handy Report's publication, British industry was already experiencing some of the far-reaching effects of changes in the domestic and international economy. The growth of the service sector (and the parallel decline in manufacturing) saw a long-term structural shift in employment and resources. Meanwhile, the globalization of capital, the fragmentation of national economies, and the segmentation of markets all had important effects on the internal structuring of companies. Lash and Urry (1987) coined the term "disorganization" to describe the resulting shift in industrial organization. The latter embodied a move away from functional interdependence, vertical integration, and centralized bureaucratic control toward functional autonomy and horizontal integration through network structures. Disorganization was advanced in part by the disaggregation of large corporations into smaller business units. It was also reflected in the out-sourcing of "non-core" activities.

At the same time, the practice of management was increasingly influenced by the advent of IT and the spread of new management techniques. The first of these is a well-rehearsed theme in studies of management. A number of writers, including Leavitt and Whistler (1958) and Mintzberg (1973) have argued that middle management work in particular is vulnerable to routinization and automation. Such views have been challenged,

however, by the informing power of IT (Zuboff, 1988). Indeed, while IT certainly automates many managerial tasks, its greatest long-run effect is to redistribute them. For example, the spread of information systems produces greater *transparency* in operations, as managers and employees alike experience information as a shared resource rather than the bureaucratic property of a particular group or function. The resulting surveillance effects not only stimulate particular kinds of managerial performance (Buchanan & McCalman 1988), but can also help to bring about a redefinition of managerial roles as the generalization and internalization of management (Bloomfield, 1991; Poster, 1990) reduces the need for formal managerial control (Sewell & Wilkinson 1992).

Again, where past accounts tended to stress technology as an exogenous impact on managerial *roles*, more recent studies have highlighted the re-invention of managerial *practices* through the spread of “managerialism” (Hoskin, 1989). This development of the technologies of management means quantifying and grading both people and events to bring them within managerial surveillance. From this standpoint, Townley is able to argue that it is “not that management gives rise to ways of managing or managerial practices, rather practices or methods of regulation give rise to management” (1993, p. 25). The emergence of management is thus seen to be closely associated with the development of bureaucracy and the techniques of accounting.

MANAGEMENT-FOR-ITSELF

If technological and organizational change is reconfiguring the way management is practiced, a further important influence is social institutions’ response to the idea of management (Scott, 1985). The distinction I am making here between the objective features of management and its reception by a wider society requires careful elaboration. This is not a call for the kind of anthropological focus that sees Gowler and Legge (1983) defining management as an “oral tradition.” Nor is it strictly concerned with the meaning that management has for employees as embodied in different styles, strategies, and ideologies. Rather, it is do with the institutionalized meaning of management—in other words, the incorporation of the management ideal within the institutions of a particular society.

Schotter (1981, p. 11) defines a social institution as “a regularity in social behaviour that is agreed to by all members of society” and which specifies behavior in specific recurrent situations. In this light, the institutionalized meaning of management involves the assimilation of the management ideal in a range of nonbusiness settings including voluntary organizations (Butler & Wilson, 1990), educational institutions (as both

purveyors and receivers of management; Willmott, 1995), and the institutions of the State. In Britain over the last decade, this process has been particularly visible in the public sector where organizations have been under “considerable pressure to import private sector values, beliefs and values” (Coopey, 1995, p. 73). In this setting, the adoption of the management concept empowers new ways of interpreting the world. For example, reclassifying the tasks of public administration as a process of “management,” as in the rise of the “new public management” (Ferlie et al., 1996), effectively lowers the barriers to the adoption of the values and practices of the private enterprise sector. As du Gay notes,

By demanding, for example—in the name of “the market,” “the customer” or whatever—that the ethical conduct of the public administrator be judged according to the rationale of the entrepreneur, the discourse of enterprise in fact requires public sector bureaucrats to assume the role of businesspersons. (du Gay, 1993, p. 19)

This institutionalization of meaning across different sectors increases the circulation of managerial innovations and ideas throughout society. Hitherto disparate groups find themselves speaking a common language. And as a common vocabulary emerges, the turnover of ideas increases, stimulated both by the wider range of groupings involved and also by the rewards for success in the competition of ideas. In the case of British management, it is clear that the 1970s onward saw a significant extension in the sphere of circulation for management thinking. In this period, the institutional scope of management was extended, with nonmanagerial groups such as business school academics and consultants becoming important players in the management field.

This extension of management into other social institutions was both symbolized and advanced by the Handy Report. The attention awarded to that report suggests that by the late 1980s, the management ideal was moving toward a position of ascendancy in British society. Or as one account puts it: “Where an earlier age believed in miracles, our own believes in management” (Williams et al., 1995, p. 9). This ability to project itself as a central part of the social order is the most far-reaching expression of “management-for-itself.” In attaining this status, management in Britain had crossed an important threshold. From being one of many competing institutional responses to societal problems—alongside state intervention, bureaucracy, professionalization, and organized science—the private sector model of management had achieved the status of “*primus inter pares*.” Management even transcended the conflicting ideologies of the political arena. During the 1990s, leading members of the Labour party, soon to be ministers in the new Labour government, attended seminars on management thinking at Templeton Management School at the University of Ox-

ford. There could be no clearer evidence that management's social and ideological status had been transformed. It was no longer disdained as a grubby industrial trade, but aspired to the hegemonic status of

... an order in which a certain way of life and thought is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with all its spirit all taste, morality, customs, relations and political principles. (Williams, 1960, p. 587)

Hegemonic orders present themselves as historical necessity not as historical accident. However, speaking of management-for-itself is also to draw attention to the historical and cultural relativism of such orders, as outlined below.

Historical Context

At one level, a historically relativist view of management simply involves reclaiming it as the product of particular historical events, in particular, the emergence of scientific management, rather than as a structural-functional imperative (Lash & Urry, 1987; Hales, 1986). More than that though is the need to see the evolution of management in terms of the political and economic history of different nations (cf. Jacques, 1996).

In the case of Britain, this involves recognizing the rather obscure origins of management. The term itself, for instance, seems to have derived originally from "manegiarre" (meaning "horse-drill") in Italian and "menager" in French, meaning control of the household (Mant, 1983). But, even when the arts of management began to be applied to industrial concerns, their practice and their practitioners remained shrouded in relative obscurity. Even interested observers such as Adam Smith and later John Stuart Mill, for instance, continued to distinguish between the process of "management" and the "managers" who were responsible for some aspects of that process (Hofstede, 1993). Only in Victorian Britain did formal managerial roles gradually evolve out of the work of overseers and clerks. Even so, while the owners of industrial enterprises were carving out a distinctive class niche for themselves, their managers still suffered from the peculiarly British stigma of involvement in industrial activity (Wiener, 1981).

Nor was this ambiguous class status entirely resolved in the first half of the twentieth century. At a nominal level, Taylorism may have unified the practice of management with the job titles of practitioners, but in Britain at least the "scientific" pretensions of its methods were not enough to legitimize the extended role which they sought to bestow on managers. This was partly because the British bias toward small firms and family control (Hannah, 1980) counteracted the professional managerialism of the large corporations. The aristocratic model of the gentleman-amateur remained

a powerful countervailing force to the professional ideal. Considering these factors, Urry suggests that the legitimacy and status of British management was not completely secure even up to the Second World War,

Management did not develop in Britain as a relatively autonomous set of interrelated professions, able to force through further widespread educational, technical and organisational reforms . . . the service class in Britain before the Second World War did not possess sufficient organisational and cultural resources to produce a substantial restructuring of British society. (1984, p. 43)

Similarly, in distinguishing between the legitimacy and technical content of British management thought, Child (1969) observes that even after the war the legitimacy content was to the fore. This was because “the management movement faced new threats to its position due to low managerial prestige, a rapid shift in the industrial balance of power to labour, and a greatly accelerated rate of socio-political change” (1969, p. 233). However, the growth of the corporatist state through the 1960s and 1970s helped to solidify the position of British management. By the 1970s and 1980s, management in Britain had achieved a strong institutionalized meaning. This was the result of a strong and recursive relationship between managers as an occupational group and the practice and context of management. The growth of large, bureaucratic organizations with myriad functional specialisms had been complemented by the emergence of distinctive and increasingly self-confident occupational groupings within the “service class.” And there was a particularly powerful interdependence between the dominant accounting profession, the control systems of business organizations, and the institutional context of the City and finance capital (Armstrong, 1991). The strong meaning of management in this period was reflected institutionally in the response of higher education—specifically, the spread of undergraduate and postgraduate business management programs and the establishment of business schools. It was also reflected politically and culturally in the stature awarded to management. Top managers, such as Sir John Harvey Jones, began to cut a dash as heroic figures, publishing their autobiographies, and being courted as authoritative social commentators.

Political and economic developments in this period further strengthened the legitimacy of management. In the late 1980s, the collapse of Communist governments reverberated around the world leaving liberal-democracy (or, more starkly, capitalism) alone on the world-stage. This was now a world “without a conscious alternative to itself” (Bauman, 1992, p. xxv). This dramatic foreclosing of ideological options had already been pre-figured by a gradual narrowing of the bounds of political change. The 1980s saw the State actively conniving in the decline of trade union power. To use Foucault’s phrase, these developments left management as the unchallenged “historical *a priori*” of the period. The stature of management in

Britain can thus reasonably be seen as reaching its zenith at this historical moment.

It would be easy to see this 1980s ascendancy as the triumph of managerial vested interests. Koch and Godden (1996), for example, argue that the "managerial class" is now so powerful that it "stands in the way of wealth creation and a new industrial order" (p. 15). However, this assertion seems hard to square with their actual view of such an order. Rather, their emphasis on "managing without management" only underlines the extent to which the spread of managerial practices is relatively independent of class-based politics. Certainly occupational changes have promoted the growth of the "service class" in British society—a broad grouping reflecting the organizational specialization ushered in by scientific management. It is also possible to argue that this class was not simply the instrument of capitalist domination but enjoyed a degree of autonomy from the structural pressures of late capitalism (Lash & Urry, 1987). At the same time, however, it is clear that this relative autonomy did not translate into a socially cohesive class project or even the kind of social closure associated with the professionalization (Parkin, 1973). For all the credentialist trimmings of the 1980s upsurge in management education, British management continued to exhibit a socially fragmented, economically polarized, and culturally stratified occupational structure (Reed, 1989).

Cultural Context

The emerging ideological ascendancy of the 1980s also needs to be bracketed by the cultural specificity of British management. As Hofstede (1993) notes, universalistic theories of management neglect the meanings attaching to the concept in different societies. This criticism of Westernized assumptions has been powerfully underlined by the success of Japanese firms. Even discounting purely culturalist accounts, it is clear that many managerial practices in Japan, such as the discourse of quality, reflect the way management is situated and interpreted within that unique society (Bratton, 1992; Deoussis, 1995).

Applying the need for cultural sensitivity to Britain, it is clear that the emergence of a self-confident managerial stratum in this country can be readily contrasted with the experience of Continental neighbors. In Germany, cultural traditions place great value on the entrepreneur and not on the manager (Lawrence, 1993). Meanwhile, the French tradition of authoritarian centralism encourages a "dirigiste" approach to the economy in which management is barely distinguishable from the civil administration in both practice and personnel (Sparrow & Hiltrop, 1994). In contrast, Britain has historically been heavily influenced by the development of managerialism in

the U.S. Reporting on a survey of top European managers, Calori (1996) identifies an "Anglo-Saxon" model of management and argues that management in Britain shares a number of characteristics with the U.S. These include a short-term orientation and a concern with shareholders rather than stakeholders. At the same time, as Calori notes, there are also significant differences between the managerial practices of the two nations, especially in terms of labor management and the extent of professionalism. In truth, even into the 1990s, British management could still be characterized as being in an "intermediate state" (Lawrence, 1993) of development.

THE EVOLUTION OF BRITISH MANAGEMENT

The foregoing account has characterized management as, on one hand, a distinct set of functions and occupational roles, and, on the other, a cultural and institutional mind-set which has diffused throughout British society. Understanding the further evolution of management in Britain, however, requires an examination of the interaction between these domains. In the terms I have been using here, we need to examine the interplay between management-in-itself and management-for-itself.

In the first instance, this involves adopting an "anti-essentialist" approach to management, which draws on interpretivist and constructivist views of organizations (e.g., Grint & Woolgar, 1997). In this approach, management can be understood metaphorically as a text which demands interpretive work on the part of its "readers"—managers, employees, customers—to enact it as a perceived reality within organizations. This usefully highlights the role played by discourse in shaping the actions of managers—a point which has been addressed in Foucauldian analyses. Equally importantly, it draws attention to the influence of the broader interpretive context upon the way management is enacted within organizations. In this wider social arena, management is not only the receiver of political and social discourse but also promotes its own ability to solve social problems. Management draws upon its control of certain kinds of knowledge to define the problems of society; problems for which there are managerial solutions (Abbott, 1988).

These points take us beyond the problematic of structure and behavior which unites essentialist and empiricist approaches. Instead, they lead toward a view of management as a "relational concept . . . [which] involves the interdependence of meaning and activity" (Townley, 1993, p. 223). In other words, because management is embedded in social relations, the meaning attributed to it by social actors is important to its practice. This perspective on management has important implications for the understanding of change and continuity. It indicates in particular that change has a double-edged quality. Change in the practice of management both advances and builds upon

Table II. Management-in-Itself and Management-for-Itself

	Management-in-Itself		Management-for-Itself
Long-term	Nature and distribution of management functions	<i>institutionalization</i> ↔ discourse	Assimilation of managerial norms within social institutions
	Managerial task characteristics	<i>reflexivity</i> ↔ techniques	Production of Managerial knowledge
Short-term	Managerial roles and behaviors	<i>intellectual and cultural networks</i> ↔ fashions	Circulation of managerial knowledge

change in the meaning of management. Without overstating this interdependency—continuity in roles can coexist alongside changes in meaning and practice—this point does highlight a need to focus on the way management is being constantly *reconstituted* through change initiatives. Instead of debating narrowly empirical questions about the numbers of managerial jobs and the content of roles, the focus shifts toward the practice of managing considered in the light of what it means to manage.

In applying this perspective to the recent evolution of management in Britain (see Table II), some important consideration has to be given to the changing scope and intensity of market forces. Over the last decade, organizations in both the public and private sectors found themselves increasingly exposed to market pressures. In the private sector, this often led to centralized support functions such as R&D and IT departments being subjected to various forms of “marketization” (Whalley, 1986; Whittington, 1990) including structural changes and outsourcing. In the public sector, exposure to market pressures took a number of different forms ranging from outright privatization to competitive tendering. In public, private, and privatized settings, the immediate effect of this exposure to market pressures was a transfer of power away from professional groups and administrators toward newly constituted management functions (Whittington et al., 1993). Purely in terms of management-in-itself, market exposure probably meant a net increase in the number of managerial jobs across the U.K. economy. At the same time, however, these changes were also subtly linked to shifts in the meaning of management. For one, increased exposure to market forces was not simply the result of globalized competition. It also reflected deliberate moves either by corporate executives or, in the

case of the public sector, by the British government, to promote marketized forms of control over large, bureaucratic organizations. Thus, even as the number of managerial jobs increased, the structural and ideological basis of management practice was being switched away from the exercise of hierarchical authority toward the servicing of customers.

Exploring the reconstitutive effect of marketization shows the co-evolution of management-in-itself and management-for-itself. In empirical terms, disentangling one from another, even for analytic purposes, is difficult. In advancing management into new spheres of activity, for instance, were the British state and corporate interests not simply exploiting a political and cultural environment which already favored managerialist solutions over other possibilities? But, while no useful answers can be given at this level of analysis, it is possible to identify three key tropes in this process of reconstituting management: "diffusion," "polarization," and "intensification" (Scarborough and Burrell, 1996).

Diffusion

As I noted earlier, the constitution of management is the product of a particular historical milieu. Recognition of this historical contingency together with recent studies of managerialism tends to question the assumed unity of role and practice in management. In the 1980s, however, conditions arose which arguably began to weaken the linkage between formally designated roles and managerial practices. One way of explaining these conditions is in terms of Child's distinction between the technical and legitimacy aspects of management. These aspects have always been closely interlinked. Techniques are used to legitimize management and, conversely, social legitimacy allows managerial practices to be delegated to neutral technical mechanisms. Events of the 1980s, however, tended to collapse this distinction altogether. To say that management has been a victim of its own ideological success would be simplifying the argument. But, the advent of techniques such as TQM, lean production, and BPR adds weight to the view that the decisive successes of the 1980s reduced the need to garner legitimacy for hierarchical authority. This may have allowed organizations greater freedom to experiment with the redistribution of managerial tasks. Certainly, the widening horizons of management-for-itself seems to have encouraged the spread of managerial practices and accountability into new sectors and new parts of the organization (Bloomfield, 1991).

Thus, the strengthening of the management ethos in the 1980s precipitated a new set of discourses which, free from the burdens of legitimation, had few scruples about a radical restructuring of management itself. This was, after all, an era characterized by worker empowerment, lean pro-

duction, and business process re-engineering, discourses which aimed to energetically destabilize orthodox formulations of the managerial role. Both the locus and the legitimation of management were challenged, as hierarchy, authority, and control gave way to competence, team-working, and empowerment. Such innovations sought to mobilize a wider range of employee capabilities by exploiting the democratic power and efficiency of team-working and self-discipline. Managerial practices were to be diffused downward and outward: from corporate headquarters to strategic business units, from managers to worker teams, from private sector to public sector, and from managers to professional groups such as clinicians in the National Health Service (Ashburner & Fitzgerald, 1996).

From a pluralist perspective, it is difficult to explain organizations' apparent willingness to contemplate this diffusion of management away from hierarchical roles. A "commodity" theory of power, as Townley puts it (1994), would see this as "conceding" control of certain processes to rank-and-file employees. On the other hand, viewing such techniques and their political effects in relational terms enables us to understand how managerial effects can be produced outside the traditional bases of managerial power and authority. Such techniques seem to represent, in fact, a blurring of the sharp division of managerial and manual labor that was first crystallized by Taylorism. Instead of the buttressing of hierarchical authority which has been the traditional objective of management techniques, these new discourses aim to diffuse the technical aspects of the management function to a widening circle of employee groups.

Without describing all of the many discursive innovations of the last decade, it is clear that a few have exercised significant influence upon the practice of management (Wilkinson & Willmott, 1995). There is TQM, for instance, which seeks to shift power from the producer to the customer (du Gay & Salaman, 1992). It involves changes in work organization, and the extensive application of techniques to measure output. Since it acts to displace the "heroic manager" in favor of surveillance systems, workforce empowerment, and the rhetoric (and pressures) of continuous improvement, TQM can hardly be dismissed as a mere extension of managerial control. As Sewell and Wilkinson note, the lateral power relations installed by TQM's privileging of the customer serve to redistribute management functions to the workforce:

Although the flatter hierarchy of JIT/TQC suggests that the controlling function of middle management has completely disappeared, we would argue that, rather than being dispensed with, it has simply been incorporated into the consciousness of the members themselves. (Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992, p. 284)

This "flattening" of the hierarchy is paralleled by a flattening of the traditional meanings of management. Once released from the traditional grid

of authority relationships, managerial practices are free to infiltrate the whole web of shopfloor social relations.

Likewise, "lean production" (Womack et al., 1990) aims to loosen middle management's control of shopfloor operations such that the workforce knowledge can be better enlisted in the pursuit of "continuous improvement." Supervisors are replaced by team leaders and workers are required to carry out "Kaizen" continuous improvement activities. Meanwhile, organizing the workers into teams serves to further integrate social relations and authority relations, and subordinates both to the task at hand. Thus, Clark's description of Pirelli's greenfield cable factory at Aberdare in Wales:

For producers at Aberdare, self-supervision has represented a major change, not only in attitudes to work, but involvement in work. If a problem arises, their first instinct is to seek to resolve it themselves—or in collaboration with other producers or maintainers—rather than calling the foreman . . . (Clark, 1993, p. 131)

The same process obtains in brownfield sites too, where self-managing teams are often part of an explicit strategy to coopt the workforce into the operation of managerial practices and disciplines. In a case-study of one such U.K. factory, Collinson (1992) describes the shopfloor effects of attempts to establish a new "corporate identity" which involved a shift from overt threat to "moral coercion." In certain situations, hierarchical control became unnecessary because as one of the workers remarked, "The men are the gaffers now. They watch each other like hawks" (p. 122). As Collinson observes, this statement "demonstrates that these workers had an unrecognized potential to 'manage' shopfloor production by collectively replacing . . . the managerial role of coercion" (p. 122). At the same time, the cooptation of the workforce is part of a production regime which economizes on the deployment of middle and first-line managers. This involves a change in roles away from progress-chasing and "man management" to roles as "facilitators" and "coaches" to work teams.

Finally, BPR too can be seen to have equivalent and equally far-reaching consequences for middle management. According to James Champy, one of the progenitors of BPR, "with the radical re-definition of work the traditional boundaries between leaders, managers and workers are breaking down . . . puts the fundamental role of management into question" (Financial Times, 14.1.94).

Despite the fashionized differences in style and language presented by these discourses, they share certain important goals. Those goals center not on labor reduction, as might have been the case 20 years ago, but on reconstituting management. As managerial practices are diffused through the technologies of surveillance and accountability, management itself is steadily naturalized as an integral part of organizational life. The hierarchical connotations of management are steadily flattened into superficially

democratic forms. The cumulative effect of such technological and organizational changes is to drive managerial practices and accountability deep into every level of organizational activity.

Polarization of Management

This diffusion of managerial practices depends on “managers managing themselves out of existence” (Deetz, 1991). In the 1980s and 1990s in Britain, however, it became clear that different groups of managers varied markedly in their willingness to sacrifice their privileged hierarchical status for the sake of the new production regimes. Middle managers, in particular, were often fierce opponents of the new discourses and sometimes more hostile than the rank-and-file workforce (Storey, 1992; *Financial Times*, 27.2.95). The contrast in attitudes to the new discourses—top management’s enthusiastic sponsorship vs. middle management resistance—highlights the growing polarization within British management. According to Lash and Urry (1987), the growth of the service class is dependent on the development of large bureaucratic corporations. Once these organizations began to fragment, however, the service class began to lose some its most secure habitats. The resulting structural insecurity was reflected in a tendency toward occupational polarization and an associated breakdown of established career paths.

In class terms, this polarization might be seen as something of a divorce between the service class and the capitalist class. Certainly, it is not difficult to see capitalist interests at work in this humbling of the pretensions of middle management groups. There is evidence that this group were seen as “overmighty subjects” by multinational capital and hence a barrier to change (Peters, 1992; Cascio, 1993). At the same time, top management were to be tied even more closely into the shareholder interest through share option schemes and the like (Armstrong, 1991). The result, as Scase and Goffee (1989, p. 186) note, is a polarization of British management with a “growing divide, between on one hand senior executives, and on the other, middle and junior executives.” Even the *Financial Times* (15.5.93, p. 12) felt moved to record the “frustration” of middle managers over the growing gap between their salaries and the soaring pay increases awarded to top management. It quoted an expert from Hay Management Consultants as saying that:

His (i.e. the middle manager’s) differential over the people below him hasn’t increased as fast as the director’s differential over him . . . the gap has widened quite significantly over the past decade.

This polarization in salaries was reflected also in the areas of managerial status and careers. For example, Dopson and Stewart’s (1990) finding that

middle management roles have expanded may reflect not only organizational change but a lowering of the status barriers between management and workers. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, many firms sought to remove the overt social distinction of management, with any visible signs of class division being carefully removed. This was signalled by, among other things, the spread of “harmonised conditions” agreements (Industrial Relations Review and Report, 1992). The latter brought managers and workers alike under the same regime for pay, timekeeping, and holidays, and sometimes gave symbolic expression to the new corporate team through the wearing of standard uniforms and the operation of single status canteens (Wibberley, 1993). As Millward (1994) notes, these agreements usually involved a “levelling down of staff terms and conditions to those of blue-collar employees, not a levelling up” (1984–1990). Formal recording of hours of work increased for both manual and staff employees during the 1980s (Millward, 1994).

Significantly, senior managers were often exempt from these developments (Yeandle & Clark, 1989), as personal contracts bound them in an ever closer embrace with capital. And if the class exclusivity of managerial status was being eroded, so too were the gender barriers which preserved male dominance. Calas and Smircich (1993), for instance, argue that the strains produced by the delayering of middle management encourages the feminization of managerial coping skills.

This wider pattern of shifting roles, identities, and status could not help but feed into the career paths of individual managers. The importance of such paths in constituting management can hardly be understated. Subjectively, the career represents a “set of organizing principles around which those in managerial and professional occupations are able to structure both their work and non-work lives” (Scase & Goffee, 1989, p. 78). Objectively, career paths represent a means of filtering and shaping managerial personnel and their orientations. From the early 1990s, however, the once sacred managerial career seemed to come under threat. For example, one U.K. Institute of Personnel Managers’ conference heard claims that nine out of ten large organizations had removed at least one level of management within the last 5 years. And the chastened chief executive of IBM in Britain issued a gloomy warning to all aspiring managers, saying that “secure jobs are a thing of the past.” More systematic evidence on this period comes from a recent study of managerial careers in the U.K. which found that:

During the recession of 1989–1992 British managers moved from a situation of predominantly proactive, career-oriented upward moves, to one of predominantly reactive, organizationally induced sideways and downwards moves (Inkson, 1995, p. 183)

The associated outpouring of self-help career handbooks and the injunction to managers to pursue “employability” (Kanter, 1993) rather than employment were merely tokens of a subtle but widespread revision of what it means to be a manager. A recent study of British Telecom, for instance, found that:

Although the formal career management processes exist in a sophisticated form on paper, they have ceased to operate in a situation where reductions in wastage and turnover have simultaneously reduced opportunities for internal job moves and led to a high degree of uncertainty over careers. (Newell & Dopson, 1995, p. 20)

The result in this case was that middle managers in the organization faced a “vacuum,” with some of them preferring to seek employment elsewhere. This kind of erosion of privileged managerial careers is especially important since, for the reasons described earlier, managers in Britain lacked any effective mechanisms of professional closure to secure their organizational roles. Reed and Anthony (1992), for example, underline this failure of British management to develop a coherent project for professionalizing themselves and thereby cementing their societal position.

Intensification of Management

This growing power distance between top and middle management encouraged an increasingly arms-length approach to control. Armstrong (1991) notes the trend for top managers to economize on trust by recruiting third parties such as accountants and consultants to monitor managers. At the same time, financial and IT systems were increasingly available to replace elaborate command structures with more intensive forms of surveillance. A survey in 1995 of 3000 members of the British Institute of Management found that 80% reported “greatly increased” workloads over the previous 2 years (Industrial Relations Review and Report, 1996).

This intensification of management went hand in hand with top management’s sponsorship of lean production, TQM, and BPR (Hill, 1991; Storey, 1992). Many writers have described such developments as a further extension of management control over employees. Lean production, for example, was relabeled “management by stress” (Parker & Slaughter, 1988). However, such techniques represent more than the re-drawing of the “frontier of control” between management and employees. They also have important effects upon the structures and processes of management. Layers of management are removed and traditional functional departments obliterated. Middle and front-line management are often the first to experience some of the more adverse effects of the new techniques.

Events at the Rover car company—Britain's last remaining indigenous producer until its takeover by BMW in 1994—exemplified some of these intensifying effects on management (Scarborough & Terry, 1997). These included a delayering of the supervisory ranks within its plants and vigorous attempts to redeploy some white-collar and managerial staff to shopfloor roles. An account of organizational change by the company's director of product development serves to encapsulate almost every element of Rover's new approach to management:

The new organizational strategy called for the dismantling of the traditional Western hierarchical management pyramid, the reduction of the management infrastructure to three or four levels and a frontal attack on generally accepted functional values. The new structure consisted of a network of entrepreneurially-led, customer-driven, interacting, multi-skilled and multi-functional teams or work cells focused towards specific Company goals by recognized achievers. (Bertodo, 1990)

CONCLUSIONS: THE FUTURE OF MANAGEMENT

Reading the Handy Report's prospectus in the light of subsequent events demonstrates some of the important changes that have taken place in the last decade. These changes center not so much on the structural position of management in Britain as on its meaning and increasingly its practice. The growth of business education, the spread of the managerial vocabulary into new spheres, and the reformulation of employee work practices all reveal important changes in the way managerial practices are institutionalized within British society. This shift in "management for itself" helps to square the circle of popular perceptions of managers being under threat with empirical findings of continuity in managerial occupations. Downsizing exercises have stimulated a widespread apprehension about the future of management which has more to do with shifts in meaning than with changes in formal roles.

As far as the future evolution of management in Britain is concerned, these developments can be viewed as a caveat against the assumption of a single historical trajectory. The dangers of such an assumption have been amply illustrated by the way predictions of the future are frequently contradicted by events. In the 1970s, for instance, it was widely predicted that the future organization would be shaped like a "tall urn" which:

. . . widens out below the top to reflect the need of the technostucture for administrative, coordinating and planning talent . . . it widens further to reflect the need for white-collar talent. And it curves in sharply towards the base to reflect the more limited demand for those who are qualified only for muscular and repetitive tasks and who are readily replaced by machines. (Kumar, 1977, p. 214)

A decade later, though, many commentators were arguing that the future organization would actually have an hour-glass shape; a few executives and specialist staff at the apex, and many office-workers and operatives at the bottom. "The middle, which used to be filled with managers, is replaced by a communications channel" (Kraft, 1987, p. 107; Perez, 1985; Baran, 1988).

In contrast, this account has sought to demonstrate that management is not constituted by the number and scope of managerial jobs alone but also by the institutionalized meaning of management within a particular society. This invalidates the idea that the future of management will be determined by the spread of IT or even by changes in organizational form. In this perspective, the practice of management is not determined solely by the technical or even the structural need for it but also by the meaning that it carries for those who manage and are managed. In this light, it is the gradual unravelling of the compacted relationships between meanings, actors, and structural contexts which gives credence to Zuboff's prediction that:

By the end of this economic transition, in twenty five years or so, the managerial hierarchy will have been dismantled and the purposes and functions of organizational membership will have been profoundly reconfigured. (Zuboff, 1995, p. 17)

From time to time, of course, other writers have produced equally sweeping predictions of the imminent demise of managerial occupations and roles. Pym (1973) saw interdependent control systems shifting authority and responsibility from individual managers to the organization as a whole. And Anthony (1977) saw the destruction of managerial ideology being paralleled by the demise of managerial organization due to rationalization and redundancy. Their verdicts were quickly overturned by history. My argument here, however, is not based on such apocalyptic expectations of the objective context for managerial work. Rather, I have assumed a fair measure of structural continuity in capitalist societies but have focused instead on what we can already see are significant shifts in the institutionalized meaning of management. These changes make it much easier (and cheaper) to eliminate middle management and control the productive part of the organization through versions of self-management based on worker empowerment, technological surveillance, and the unrelenting pressures of the market. To the extent that organizations in Britain exploit these opportunities to reconstitute management, the questions which concerned Handy and which dominated the subsequent debate—questions about the numbers, roles, and job content of managers—may simply cease to be relevant. The new meanings of "organizational membership" to use Zuboff's term, may ultimately mean the unmaking of management as we know it.

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