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# **Management Education A Polemic**

## **Introduction**

This paper, which is intentionally and unashamedly polemical, is a contribution to the timely, if not overdue, debate on management education to which Willmott (1994) has provided a 'provocation'. Our intention is to provoke critical reflection upon and by management academics. At the present time there is considerable uncertainty in the minds of many management educators as to how they should adapt to the new challenges posed by changing management practice and developments in knowledge. The traditional 'Harvard model' of teaching has now been called into question (Linder and Smith, 1992) whilst management gurus, such as Tom Peters, have begun to articulate visions of chaos (Peters, 1989) which sit uneasily with the old rigidities of traditional management education. It is within this context that we seek to make a case for what we call a 'critical' approach to management education. In making such a case, however, we do not develop the details of an alternative curriculum or pedagogy (see Grey et al., forthcoming). This is partly for reasons of space and occasion, and partly because it is not our intention to lay down, in doctrinaire fashion, a blueprint for what management education should consist of in detailed terms. Nor do we wish to imply that we are somehow in privileged possession of an intellectual or moral advantage over those who hold positions with which we take issue. With these caveats, however, we do wish to suggest that there is something seriously amiss with mainstream management education. In the remainder of this section, we begin to map out the themes which we develop in the paper.

The central argument of the paper is that

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mainstream management education<sup>1</sup> re-enforces the technicist and commonsensical understandings of many management students. Such students resist learning anything which they perceive as 'theoretical', 'impractical' or irrelevant', preferring to learn specific techniques which they see as useful; and mainstream management education readily serves up a diet of such techniques. This is not to say that mainstream management education is axiomatically devoid of elements of critique. The teaching of management techniques, such as discounted cash flows, organizational design or systems analysis, may present an opportunity for some management students to analyse the deficiencies of current management theory and practice. Equally, much of the mainstream is concerned to produce alternative techniques, for instance soft systems methodologies (Wilson, 1984) in contrast to traditional systems analysis, or 'flat' organizational design which rejects traditional hierarchies. These sorts of development highlight the problematic nature of management techniques and practices, and reflect the diversity of representations of management. However, many of these suggested alternatives can be further analysed, *critically*, as being primarily concerned with providing yet more technical solutions of different (and perhaps higher) levels of sophistication, therefore strengthening, rather than challenging, technicist and instrumental understandings of management.

We argue that there exists a considerable body of management research, originating in critical social science (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 1992), which suggests how and why such views of management could be challenged, but we would contend that this has not been widely translated into management teaching. Admittedly, courses in Business Ethics, Corporate Governance or Women in Management have been attached to many management curricula, adding a 'critical' touch. But although such topics may propose new challenges, a syllabus containing these types of subject will not necessarily be more critical in the sense which we develop shortly, because their emergence is not critically appraised and they are assimilated into mainstream, managerialist understandings of management education.<sup>2</sup>

In this context, the term 'managerialist' denotes, broadly speaking, the view that management education stands in a functional relationship to management itself: that the aim of management education is to contribute to and improve organizational effectiveness and the performance of individual managers. Managerialist management academics replicate commonsensical views by treating management as a morally and politically neutral technical activity. Hence, management education becomes primarily concerned with the acquisition of techniques, regardless of the context of their application. Critical management academics, on the other hand, are concerned to analyse management in terms of its social, moral and political significance and,

in general terms, to challenge management practice rather than seek to sustain it.

From a critical perspective, the teaching of management techniques is not, in and of itself, a valid model of management education because it aspires (plainly with more or less success) to bolster, rather than debunk, managerial dominance. Consider an example from a textbook, chosen at random from our bookshelves:

The intention is to help the reader gain a better insight into this complex and multilayered topic [human resource management!] in order ... to be in a better position to shape strategic action in his/her own organisation. (Harrison, 1993: 4)

Here it is plain that the object of management education is to improve the managerial competence of students for instrumental reasons of control ('to shape strategic action'). This may occur because the manager acquires more effective techniques or, perhaps more significantly, because management education bestows a legitimacy upon those managers who possess it. In neither case is the instrumental rationality of control subjected to critical scrutiny. Instead, it is assumed that because practices of control routinely occur in organizations, it is acceptable that management education should contribute to this control.

We go on to argue that this mainstream conception of management education is specifically related to an erroneous distinction of 'academia' and the 'real world', in which the former defers to the latter and is defined by it, with deleterious consequences for the quality of management education. This claim leads directly to a consideration of quality initiatives in higher education, including management education. We argue that these are premised upon the same distinction of academia and the real world, and that they re-enforce the untenable conception of management and management education as neutral, technical activities. But we also argue that, because quality initiatives are managerial in character, management academics have a particular intellectual responsibility to question and analyse their credibility. So on the subject of quality initiatives we make two arguments. First, that they are damaging to education in general: by importing 'real-world' and 'commonsensical' concepts such as customers and markets, they commodify both the teaching relationship and knowledge itself; this has particularly disastrous consequences for management education where the need to satisfy the customer's need for relevance to the real world impoverishes further the teaching/learning experience. Our second argument is that management academics should contribute to exposing the unacceptability of quality management in general, an unacceptability that we claim amounts to a form of managerially based totalitarianism.

From this, it follows that management education is intimately bound up with politics more generally. Although space precludes a proper analysis of the links between the two, we point to some of the connections between management education and the New Right, focusing especially on the link between the concepts of 'commonsense' in both. We conclude by arguing that managerialist management academics, who define the mainstream of management education, avoid the questions of the moral, political, social and philosophical issues which management raises. This is not simply to argue for a more politicized (or even 'politically correct') model of management education. Rather, it is to argue for the recognition of the politicization which is inevitably, albeit implicitly, present whenever management is taught. Unless or until managerialist academics recognize the challenge of critical work, they will be unable to challenge and extend students' existing horizons and unable to do more than defer to managers. In both of these aspects, management education fails in its pedagogical and intellectual responsibilities: to expand students' minds and to 'speak truth to power'.

### **Critical Research and Technician Students**

In recent years, there has been the development of a substantial, if marginal, tradition of research within management and business disciplines, which may be designated as 'critical'. Such research takes a variety of forms and, for present purposes, may most readily be defined in negative terms, that is in terms of its rejection of managerialism. Managerial research is animated by a desire to describe the activity of management and/or to prescribe ways in which managerial effectiveness may be enhanced, thereby boosting productivity and profitability. Critical research has no such aspirations. Typically, it aims to explore and expose the social, political and moral nature—and, usually, the shortcomings—of management. Managerial research, by contrast, eschews such issues, presenting management as an unproblematic set of techniques and practices.

The perspectives which critical research on management brings to bear are very diverse, and it is not our intention to describe them. Just within the field of organization studies, Reed (1992) identifies at least eight different approaches which could be called critical, and this omits one of the principal critical approaches, namely feminism (e.g. Ferguson, 1984) whilst understating the proliferation of postmodern contributions to organization studies (see Cooper and Burrell, 1988). It is probably true that critical work on management is most developed in the field of work and organization studies, but there also exists a flourishing critical tradition in accounting (e.g. Burchell et al., 1980; Tinker, 1985) and a more limited amount of critical work in other management subjects, such as marketing (Firat et al., 1987). The scope

of critical management research is evidenced in the diversity of contributions to Alvesson and Willmott (1992), who amalgamate under the term 'critical' approaches to management those that derive from both Foucault and Post-structuralism as well as those deriving from the Critical theory of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School. These traditions are used to analyse critically a range of management specialisms. But the invocation of such traditions is a sad contrast to the daily reality of most of the syllabi of management degrees as currently constituted, for the extent to which the critical research tradition has been translated into teaching is extremely limited (cf. Reed and Anthony, 1992; French and Grey, forthcoming).

It is not sufficient to ascribe this to an inadequacy on the part of students, as if they have no need or no ability to engage with or understand the debates which preoccupy at least some of their teachers. Instead, it is necessary to grasp the precise conditions of existence of our students' intellectual worlds. Although the extent to which such precision is possible is limited by the tremendous differences in the interests, abilities and motivations of our students, from our experience,<sup>3</sup> we believe it is possible to identify some recurring themes of tension which arise in teaching management. We conclude this section by offering a characterization of these themes. It is obvious that the tensions that critical academics experience are not felt by managerialist academics, for whom the students' world-view is an approximation to their own.

Many students articulate or imply an attitude to learning management which profoundly contradicts the intellectual projects of critical approaches to management. This attitude consists of a related set of concerns that education should be 'useful', 'practical' and 'relevant to the real world'. Such an attitude places a premium upon learning *techniques*, whose practical relevance should be demonstrable, and these techniques should be backed up by constant reference to real-world examples or case studies.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this paper we describe such an attitude as *technicist*. The technicist label relates not only to the focus on techniques but also to the fact that the technicist approach is illuminated by a commitment to instrumental rationality.<sup>5</sup>

Mastering rational and objective techniques preserves the illusion that technical fixes are neutral and universally applicable, and contributes to the building of specialized knowledge which others do not possess, hence justifying management roles and strengthening managerial control. Furthermore, the notion of a management technique is not limited to hard-type techniques, such as accounting or operations management, but includes 'softer' approaches—for instance change management or human resource management techniques. Technicist managerialism also calls upon a range of *commonsense* ideas in order to circumscribe and justify the domain and means of management

intervention. But although commonsense is elevated above 'theoretical', 'academic' or 'abstract' thought, it cannot be equated with some kind of basic, pre-theoretical knowledge. On the contrary, commonsense implies a highly complex, albeit unarticulated, set of theoretical commitments. Commonsense is therefore something that is accomplished. Anthony (1986), posing the question as to why management education does not provide intellectually demanding and critical courses, notes that 'The ostensible explanation is that the managers would find such [courses] impractical, unreal, 'academic', [but] managers reject critical disciplines and concepts because they have been taught to reject them' (p. 139). So commonsense must be understood not as a 'given' which we have to work within, but as a limiting construct which we must work away from. In the next section we seek to explore the nature and difficulties of notions of commonsense as they impinge upon management education.

### **The Paradox of Commonsense**

The appeal of 'commonsense' appears to be considerable. In this case, the commonsense is, in particular, that management is a necessary and desirable social activity which is morally and politically neutral (cf. MacIntyre, 1981; Roberts, 1984; Anthony, 1986). This supposed neutrality enables the conceptualization of management as a purely technical activity. Therefore, management education is primarily a matter of the acquisition of techniques whose value lies in their potential for practical and effective application. A cursory glance at almost any management textbook will confirm the centrality of all or most of this definition—even in an apparently 'unconventional' text, we find that the exploration of the concept of creativity has an instrumental aim: 'By understanding the creative process and characteristics of a creative environment the creative manager is better placed to remove the barriers to creative action' (Henry, 1991: 11).

Management students, for their part, are commonly more comfortable when learning techniques (such as those of finance, accounting or systems analysis, or 'methodologies' of change management or motivation) which they perceive as practically orientated, useful and immediately applicable. This comfort derives from the fact that insofar as the learning of techniques re-enforces an existing commonsense view, students are not required to reflect critically upon themselves or the world around them.<sup>6</sup> But here a paradox reveals itself because, at the same time, students will often bemoan the lack of stimulation and the tedium associated with the passive receipt of commodified knowledge (Grey et al., 1991) which typically accompanies the technicist curriculum. Although this complaint is articulated, and frequently addressed, through issues of the presentation and style of teaching, such an articulation cannot capture the more fundamental problems of technicist modes of learning and teaching. For these problems are not

presentational: rather they derive from the restricted understanding of the world which is entailed by a commitment to commonsense. Commonsense requires the unquestioned delimitation of the terrain of relevance from that of irrelevance.

The paradox of commonsense also becomes apparent when learning about more 'theoretical' topics such as organizational behaviour, organizational culture or change management. Students in the technician mode will typically react in one of two ways to such topics. One way will be to regard them simply as irrelevant and therefore failing to meet the commonsensical criteria of value: this is implicit when students denigrate such topics as 'the soft, waffly stuff'. 'Soft' concepts are frequently seen as unnecessary academic constructs addressing simple problems which can be more easily solved using, for instance, basic and seemingly unproblematic organizational psychology principles or data-modelling techniques. Students responding in this way will often exhibit considerable hostility when challenged upon the adequacy of their beliefs.

But there is a second response from technician students to 'soft' topics in management. This response regards such topics as being obvious, and at best codifying what was already known as commonsense: this is implicit in comments such as 'it's just a few diagrams with words and arrows' and explicit in comments such as 'it's obvious' or 'it's just commonsense'. This second type of response is interesting. It may, on occasion, simply indicate a reductionism in which complex ideas are reduced to commonsense and thereby denigrated for having been presented pretentiously. But it may also indicate a legitimate disappointment which reflects the banality of much of what passes as theorizing in management disciplines, involving as it does the simplistic importation of theories from psychology, sociology or economics. At first sight, this might be taken to support a view that there is space for introducing more sophisticated ideas to management students. However, less optimistically, it may suggest simply that technician students will delight in seizing on simplistic theorizing to prove the validity of their own commonsense prejudice, and that the introduction of greater sophistication would cause students to fall back on the first response of decrying 'theorizing' as irrelevant.

So management education is caught in a vicious circle: what is to be taught has to be practically orientated towards commonsensical understandings of the real world (a term we return to later) otherwise it is 'only' theorizing, but, if it is so orientated, it is 'only' commonsense. In these circumstances, many teachers will fall back upon, or indeed begin with, the presentation of ever more complex 'models' (cf. 'theories') accompanied by very detailed 'real-world' examples which purport to provide generalizable solutions to business problems. This satisfies the technician students who feel that they are being



taught something which is relevant but, because of the level of detail, was previously unknown. It may also provide fresh jargon to impress the uninitiated whilst giving initiates the credentials they need to operate in the contemporary world of management-speak. Teaching is, in this sense, more than commonsense, but never challenges commonsense. Unfortunately, such teaching, whilst perhaps satisfying the short-term desire to get through sessions and courses without confrontation with students, is self-defeating in the long term (Reed and Anthony, 1992).

The long-term problems which arise come from the fact that the solutions to business problems so confidently propounded in the lecture hall can never deliver what they promise because of the inherently uncontrollable nature of social relations, including those in work organizations (MacIntyre, 1981).<sup>7</sup> As this becomes apparent, students may come to look upon their time at university with misgivings,<sup>8</sup> and ascribe these to the 'unrealistic' and 'impractical' approach of academics which they find to be inapplicable in the 'real world'. But because their basic faith in technicist solutions has been pandered to by academics, these ex-students will continue the ever more desperate search for such solutions, perhaps through the services of consultants. At the same time, they can perpetuate their derogatory view of 'academia' as divorced from the commonsense practicality of the real world.

An additional difficulty for teachers of management is that, at least amongst postgraduate and post-experience students, different specialisms, such as HRM, marketing or IT, exhibit different articulations of commonsense and use their set of techniques to assert different professional identities. What this diversity of specialist modes of commonsense should point to is that the notion of the 'real world' as some sort of ultimate ontological court of arbitration is nonsensical. It is commonplace in organizations for functional groups to denigrate each other for their lack of attachment to the real world (for example, production engineers vs personnel managers; accountants vs doctors). This in itself should lead management academics to question the repeated paeans which technicist students and others make to the 'real world'. But beyond this, the acceptance of the dichotomy of real world/academia by many management academics constitutes one of the major obstacles to the provision of an intellectually defensible management education.

The notion of the 'real world' implies a hierarchical pairing of the real and the unreal, academia and not-academia (French, 1993; Grey, 1994a). Yet how is the division between real world and academia to be sustained? It cannot be said that the dividing line is production for profit, since this would render all public-sector work unreal. It is more likely that the dividing line is between 'theory' and 'practice', but

again this is problematic since all practice implies some theory even if unstated. Furthermore, academics engage in practice: the practice of teaching, research and administration. Even if, restricting the issue to management, an attempt were made to separate theory and practice, this would still fail since management academics have to practise the management of their teaching, research and administration whilst managers have to reflect upon their practice, and this implies theorizing, even if only in a weak sense.

But, incoherent as it may be, the notion of the real world has a strong hold upon the imaginations of management academics and students. Amongst academics, this seems to be both the condition and consequence of insecurity and fear. The veneration which many management academics display for MBA and post-experience students, in particular, is quite striking. There seems to be a belief, tinged with anxiety, that somehow these students have a privileged key (i.e. 'real-world' experience) which threatens to discredit or undermine their teachers' knowledge. Mainstream management academics elevate the world of the practitioner as 'real' and, conversely, conceptualize their own world as *not* being real. It is small wonder that academics who regard themselves as illusory, false or imaginary experience insecurity when teaching! Insecurity also follows from regarding knowledge as a commodified possession, owned by academics and imparted to students. Such an approach will always be precarious because knowledge is relational (Freire, 1971, 1974): the outcome of an inter-subjective process rather than an object to be distributed. And finally, academics' fear of their students follows from the hollowness of claims to possess solutions to business problems: since such solutions are generally illusory, there is always the possibility that MBA students, and others, will identify the flaws in any specific prescriptions offered by management academics.

Faced with the insecurity which the real world–academia dichotomy produces, management academics often respond by, paradoxically, further entrenching themselves in that dichotomy by seeking to provide ever more 'practical' teaching material, and substituting consultancy for research. In this they seek to distance themselves from 'discredited' academia but, since they remain employed as academics, this attempt is always precarious, and indeed contradictory. These remarks, of course, apply principally to managerialist academics. Critical academics follow a different course. Some, particularly those of sufficient eminence, will be able to establish a legitimate institutional place on their own terms. Others will seek to teach in ways which are congruent with their beliefs, in the process running into the resistance of technicist students, and the disapprobium of managerialist colleagues. Still others will sublimate their intellectual beliefs for the purposes of teaching.

But, in general, all critical academics face a situation where the real-world, commonsense orthodoxy is the dominant force within the institutions where they are employed, and this will be reflected in the prospectuses and PR material of those institutions. There can be very few business schools which tell the world that students will be taught to understand how organizations exploit their workers by the expropriation of surplus value, for example, even though this could plausibly be regarded as just as 'realistic' as, if not more so than, the accounts of the employment relationship to be found in most management textbooks, and might even be more useful to students (Anthony, 1986). Given this official orthodoxy, the attempts of critical academics to introduce more intellectually rigorous teaching on their own initiative must always be marginal and of limited legitimacy.

Our comments so far obviously imply that we are deeply sceptical about the quality of most management education, since we are claiming that it does little more than pander to students' prejudices. But, as most readers of this paper can hardly fail to be aware, the quality of university teaching is currently the subject of considerable attention in UK institutions. How does this relate to what we have been discussing?

### **Quality and Managerial Totalitarianism**

Quality initiatives in higher education are explicitly an attempt to bring academia into the 'real world' under the rhetoric of 'accountability'. Academics, so the argument goes, are in receipt of large quantities of public money and they therefore have an obligation to give an account of how this money is spent, which can then form the basis for decisions as to where money should best be allocated. As part of the general development of performance appraisal in UK universities (Townley, 1993), initiatives on teaching quality have a particular place. In essence, these initiatives are an attempt to introduce bureaucratic management controls into universities, and, within this, student evaluations play a key role. The notion of student evaluation of teaching, whilst superficially a democratic exercise to equalize the relationship of teacher and student, is more profoundly concerned to redefine that relationship in line with a certain conception of the market. Thus universities and university teachers become 'producers' of knowledge and students become 'consumers' or 'customers'. Such a conception, which is becoming widespread in the public sector and in private sector re-organizations (du Gay and Salaman, 1992) is as pernicious as it is absurd.

First, the absurdity. The market conception of the teaching relationship involves the ultimate commodification of both that relationship and knowledge itself. However, as noted earlier, knowledge is not a commodity (Friere, 1971, 1974) but the outcome of a dialectical

relationship between teacher and taught, and any pedagogy worthy of the name needs to engage seriously with the challenges this implies (Grey et al., 1991). On the specific question of students as consumers, it is plain that the market model is inadequate. Whereas the purchase of economic goods requires only that the consumer pay the price in order to enjoy use of the goods, in education, on the other hand, payment of fees is only the condition of entry. It cannot constitute an entitlement, since the benefits of education are only realizable insofar as students, as well as teachers, fulfil mutual obligations in the course of their relationship. Moreover, the value of education is not something which can be known at the time of purchase and, indeed, may not become apparent until well after the point of 'consumption'. One of the central difficulties with the notion of the student as customer in the context of what we have argued so far, is that it legitimates giving technicist students what they 'want', even if this is academically suspect.

But, absurd as it may be, the market conception of education is also pernicious, and especially so in management education, when it is combined with the technicist orientation of students which we have described. For the quality initiatives are predicated upon precisely the same technicist, commonsense assumptions which bedevil management education. Student feedback, particularly on MBA and post-experience courses, typically relates to notions of relevance, applicability and immediate usability of course material. These teaching-quality assessment exercises have an insidious conforming and confirming effect on commonsensical and technicist approaches to teaching management students. Conforming because they encourage academics to pander to students' technicism and confirming because they re-enforce students' belief that relevance and applicability are indeed the criteria by which education is to be judged.

Within the field of quality assessment, management academics have a double responsibility. First, as intellectuals they should assume a general responsibility for questioning underlying values:

Intellectuals are in a position to expose the lies of governments, to analyse actions according to their causes and motives and often hidden intentions ... [i]t is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and expose lies. (Chomsky, 1969: 227–8)

Second, as intellectuals who specialize in thinking about management they should engage in a critical analysis of quality initiatives as a dominant part of current management theory and practice.

Our experience suggests that these responsibilities are fulfilled only to a limited extent. Of course, this partly reflects the fact that the political and institutional pressures are such as to make resistance hazardous and largely ineffectual. However, intellectual responsibility is not so easily passed over: in replicating students' assumptions about

commonsense and the real world, management academics are not just colluding in the erosion of academic values through quality initiatives, but also abdicating their fundamental responsibility as teachers to expand rather than restrict the ways in which students regard the world. In the present context this amounts to a collaboration with an insidious form of totalitarianism.

For we regard the developing situation, not just in universities but throughout organizations and society, as being akin to totalitarianism and, specifically, totalitarianism based upon management. Marcuse (1964/1986) showed how modern industrial societies exhibited totalitarian and repressive characteristics under the guise of democratic freedom. The principal means of control were seen to be mass consumption and mass media. In contemporary times, management must be added to these controls. As long ago as 1933, Simone Weil suggested that there was 'a new species of oppression, oppression in the name of management' (Weil, 1933/1988: 9).

In claiming that management constitutes a species of oppression or an aspect of totalitarianism, we are not primarily thinking of the traditional functions of control and coordination—or exploitation—which have been carried out by management in work organizations. Instead, we refer to contemporary attempts to forge organizational commitment through 'corporate culturism', excellence prescriptions, quality initiatives and the like. Willmott (1993) argues that corporate culture initiatives have characteristics in common with Orwell's (1949) dystopian vision of totalitarianism in *1984*. Binns (1993), in a brilliant and, regrettably, under-exposed historical and political analysis of quality management, shows very clearly how such management constitutes 'bureaucratic totalitarianism'. This totalitarianism requires not only the acceptance of market relations as natural, just and inevitable but also that individuals give their hearts and minds to the quasi-religious corporate devotions called for by the management gurus. Pursuing this analogy, business schools become the theological colleges of 'managerial evangelism' (Kerfoot and Knights, 1993) or, more straightforwardly, the ideologists of bureaucratic totalitarianism.

But, beyond this, we also see the development of a totalizing discourse of management as a way of organizing social and individual life. Recent work (Rose, 1989; Giddens, 1991) has drawn attention to the ways in which the notion of managing or 'governing' the self have become central to contemporary existence. Individuals increasingly manage their lives as a project, encompassing health, diet, lifestyle (Giddens, 1991), psychic well-being (Rose, 1989) and career (Grey, 1994). At the social level too, every day we are told that 'as a society' we must have a 'strategy' to deal with crime, poverty or energy. The economy must be 'managed' (Miller and Rose, 1990), so too must

international relations. So management has become a much wider issue than the control of work organizations. In this sense, management becomes a form of politics beyond the state (Rose and Miller, 1992). Given that our focus here is upon management education, we cannot discuss in depth the argument we have outlined here. Instead, we turn to some specific aspects of the political dimensions of management education.

### **Management Education and the New Right**

Whether the argument about management and totalitarianism is accepted, it is nevertheless plain that there exist a number of connections between what we have been claiming about management education and recent developments in the UK polity. An apocryphal story has it that Margaret Thatcher, when told by a Cambridge undergraduate that she was studying Ancient Norse, commented that this was 'a luxury'. What this underlines is that New Right governments have conceptualized education in terms of its functional utility to the economy. There can be little doubt that the exponential growth of management degree courses in the 1980s reflected the notion that such degrees were desirable because of their usefulness. For individuals this may only have meant that such courses appeared to encourage better job prospects, but for New Right theorists the management student seemed altogether more worthy than the much demonized 'lefty sociology' student, preaching revolution at the taxpayers' expense. More specifically, the growth of MBA programmes in the 1980s was an intrinsic part of the 'yuppie phenomenon'.

The relationship between management and the New Right is complex. Although the rhetoric of the New Right was about the ability of markets to determine resource allocation autonomously, managers were essential to its social vision. The assault on trade unionism was in part an attempt to create a second managerial revolution in which managers had their hands 'untied', leaving them free to manage. Whilst there is some evidence that the Thatcher governments were dismayed by the failure of management to take full advantage of this new freedom, managers remained an essential part of the New Right programme. Nowhere has this been more obvious than in the public sector where, paradoxically, managerial bureaucracy has been used as the means to create a free market. Equally, in many policy areas, the invocation of the 'businessman' (sic) as the fount of all knowledge has been widespread. Thus businessmen are seen to be able to offer a unique insight into education, social work and healthcare, as well as economic policy. Within this general lionization of managers, management education became an almost uniquely favoured field of academia.

If management subjects became the acceptable face of universities in the 1980s (and there is much more that could be written about that),

then, at the same time, the commonsense orientation we have described above became one of the dominant ideologies. Although much of New Right thinking was predicated upon more or less sophisticated versions of laissez-faire economics, its populist appeal was articulated in terms of commonsense (a striking example being Thatcher's 'housewife' analogy for government finances). This trend has become even more heavily emphasized by John Major in his call to get 'back to basics', perhaps because of the lack of even the pretence of a coherent economic and political theory. At the present time, most obviously in recent speeches by Michael Portillo and Prince Charles, commonsense is used as an explicit rallying call against 'so-called experts' in all fields, but especially social policy. Somehow it is believed that if only 'the British'—or even the 'English'—could recover their commonsense from the corrupting effects of 1960s liberals and armchair theorists then, miraculously, traditional values would be restored and, with them, economic success and social harmony.

We do not have space to elaborate on the simultaneously facile and vicious character of these prescriptions. But their banal horror can be seen to be congruent with the commonsensical attitudes displayed by management students and connived in and reproduced by many mainstream managerialist academics. For what management education commonly does is to perpetuate an attitude which leaves inviolate students' prejudices and assumptions about the world. Students demand that their teachers do not disrupt their world-views with complicated theories and critical questions, but instead provide useful facts, models and techniques: most of their teachers slavishly obey. However, it is an abdication of pedagogical responsibility in management education to avoid the moral, political, social and philosophical issues which management raises. It is not intellectually tenable to avoid such issues since they are always *pre-supposed* whenever 'techniques' are taught. Nor is it possible to truncate these issues by subsuming them into a managerialist frame, as with Business Ethics or Women in Management courses. What is necessary in management education is for teachers to assume responsibility for asking serious, critical questions of management, rather than obsequiously adhering to the values of managers and the commonsense prejudices of students.

What is created, in part by the abdication of this responsibility, is the view that the values embodied in management practice are simply 'the way things are', a reality which is unquestioned in terms of its historical and social construction and unchallenged by the spectre of other possibilities. Here again there is a resonance with Marcuse's critique of contemporary modes of totalitarianism:

The Happy Consciousness—the belief that the real is rational and that the system delivers the goods—reflects the new conformism which is a facet of

technological rationalities translated into social behaviour. (Marcuse, 1986/1964: 84)

The conformism induced by the tyranny of commonsense is obviously not confined to, nor simply a product of, management education. But management education occupies a pivotal point between politics, work and intellectual activity. The fact that this is not even recognized by the dominant mainstream of management academics is not simply an indictment of students, managers or politicians (although all of these groups have their own responsibilities) but of management academics themselves.

## Concluding Remarks

In this paper we have sought to raise fundamental questions about the nature of management education. In so doing, we join those writers who are beginning to articulate a demand for a management education which takes the intellectual rigour of critical management research and translates it directly into courses on management (Anthony, 1986; Nord and Jermier, 1992; Reed and Anthony, 1992; Willmott, 1994; French and Grey, forthcoming).

We believe that it is indefensible for critical approaches to management to be marginalized as an esoteric research interest. It is also indefensible for management academics to continue working in the managerialist frame, not because they disagree<sup>9</sup> with critical approaches but because they do not even attempt to engage with them. Critical work on management has mounted a serious intellectual challenge to managerialism, but many management academics seem to see it not just as possible but as desirable to act as if no challenge existed, and to pass on to students knowledge which is at best problematic and at worst discredited. What other academic discipline would proceed in such a fashion? It is as if biologists ignored the theory of evolution, or chemists treated the atom as an invisible particle. What would we say if biologists or chemists ignored such developments because to do otherwise would disrupt the common-sense views of their students and employers?

Our answer to this question is that we would say that they had abdicated their fundamental intellectual responsibilities, and this is exactly what the mainstream of management academics has done.

## Notes

1. By 'management education' we mean teaching and research on management as practised in universities whether at undergraduate or postgraduate level or as a subsidiary course of study for students of other subjects. This is consistent with Willmott's (1994) distinction between management education and management training. Where relevant, we have drawn distinctions between, in particular, undergraduate and MBA and other postgraduate courses.



2. Thus, for example, Women in Management courses may raise issues of gender discrimination in work organizations by conceptualizing the problem as the fact that women do not share equally in the symbolic and material rewards which male managers enjoy. But this stops short of raising questions about the role of gendered inequality in the maintenance of capitalist social relations, or the problematic masculinity of hierarchical and competitive ways of organizing production.
3. This encompasses our experience as students (of various subjects) at six institutions in two countries and as teachers in seven institutions during 14 years, as well as discussions with colleagues in management education in numerous institutions in several countries.
4. We do not imply that the use of case studies is an inherently managerialist approach to management education. On the contrary, case studies can and are equally used in critical management education to illustrate, develop and clarify arguments. What we are identifying by this remark is the use of case studies as a device to avoid critical reflection by appealing to the practical effectiveness, and therefore desirability, of what is being taught. This has been a traditional mainstay of management pedagogy as defined by the 'Harvard Model' (now abandoned at Harvard).
5. By instrumental rationality we mean a rationality which is concerned only with the adoption of the most appropriate means to achieve a given end, as opposed to reflection upon the rationality and desirability of ends themselves.
6. The opposite, in fact, of the classical meaning of education!
7. The idea that social relations are uncontrollable is one which may be unfamiliar in mainstream management education, where there is an assumption that such control is not only desirable but possible. The issues here are complex, but in essence the argument is that people, unlike physical objects, have the capacity to respond to, resist and reject attempts to control them, and always engage in interpretation, re-interpretation and mis-interpretation of their circumstances. In management, this is perhaps most obvious in the attempt to manage culture. Many writers (e.g. Anthony, 1994) have argued that such attempts will always be limited by the nature of human existence. More generally, we can see that the constant reworking of techniques of management control is evidence that it is not possible to find a formula which unambiguously 'works'.
8. Of course, those managers with academic qualifications will have an interest in claiming the value of those qualifications despite any misgivings. Equally, we recognize that students will often genuinely derive personal benefit from at least some elements within their courses.
9. To underline a point we made in the introduction, it is not our intention to argue that all management educators should take a particular political or intellectual line. But we do believe that, whatever line they take, it should be on the basis of an intellectual engagement with other positions rather than on one of ignoring other positions. This comment applies quite as much to critical as to managerialist academics.

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