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Dossier de recherche en vue de l'obtention d'une
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La recherche en management comme champ philosophique

Partie II : Annexes

Présenté et soutenu par Jean-Etienne Joullié
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Annexe 1 : Curriculum Vitae

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École de Management Léonard de Vinci	Faculté des Sciences Sociales
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Diplômes

PhD	Macquarie University, 2012.
MBA	Australian Graduate School of Management (UNSW), 2004.
Diplôme d'ingénieur	CentraleSupélec, 1989.

Publications

<u>Articles dans des revues à comité de lecture</u>

1. Joullié, J.-E., Gould, A. M. & Spillane, R. (in-press). The language of executive coaching: A developmental framework. ***Academy of Management Learning and Education***.

2. Joullié, J.-E. & Gould, A. M. 2022. Having nothing to say but saying it anyway: Language and practical relevance in management research. ***Academy of Management Learning and Education***.

3. Spillane, R. & Joullié, J.-E. 2022. Authority, conformity and obedience: Applying Friedrich's theory of authority to the classics. ***British Journal of Social Psychology***, 1-15.

4. Spillane, R. & Joullié, J.-E. 2021. The decline of authority and the rise of managerialism. ***Organization***, 1-20.

5. Joullié, J.-E. & Spillane, R. 2021. 'Physics envy in organisation studies: The case of James G. March'. ***Journal of Management History***, 28(2): 236-254.

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7. Joullié, J.-E., Gould, A., Spillane, R. & Luc, S. 2021. The language of authority and power in leadership. ***Leadership Quarterly***, 32(4): 1-12.

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9. Muurlink, O., Gould, A. & Joullié, J.-E. 2020. Clustered iconography: A resurrected method for representing multidimensional data. *Sociological Methods and Research*. XX(X): 1-37.

10. Joullié, J.-E. 2018. Management without theory for the twenty-first century. *Journal of Management History*, 24(4): 377-395.

11. Gould, A. & Joullié, J.-E. 2017. Parallel universe or proven future? The language of dependent means t-test interpretations. *Journal of Modern Applied Statistical Methods*, 16(2): 200-214.

12. Joullié, J.-E. 2016. The philosophical foundations of management thought. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 15(1): 157-179.

13. Joullié, J.-E. & Spillane, R. 2015. Heroic Drucker. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 128(1): 95-105.

14. Joullié, J.-E. 2014. The philosopher and the manager. *International Journal of Management Concepts and Philosophy*, 8(4): 197-208.

Livres

1. Spillane, R. & Joullié, J.-E. 2022. *Overcoming Managerialism: Power, Authority and Rhetoric at Work*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

2. Joullié, J.-E. & Spillane, R. 2021. *The Philosophical Foundations of Management Thought (Revised and Expanded Edition)*. New York: Lexington Books.

3. Spillane, R. & Joullié, J.-E. 2015. *Philosophy of Leadership: The Power of Authority.* London: Palgrave Macmillan. A paperback edition appeared in December 2019.

4. Joullié, J.-E. & Spillane, R. 2015. *The Philosophical Foundations of Management Thought*. New York: Lexington Books. A paperback edition appeared in July 2017.

5. Joullié, J.-E. 2013. *Will to Power, Nietzsche's Last Idol*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Publications dans des revues sans comité de lecture

1. Joullié, J.-E. 2022. Qu'est-ce qu'un 'leader' ? The Conversation (France). https://theconversation.com/quest-ce-quun-leader-176704 (published online on 10-March).

2. Joullié, J.-E. 2021. Le langage du leadership. Vidéo FNEGE media. Available from https://fnege-medias.fr/fnege-video/le-langage-du-leadership/. This video was selected by FNEGE media as 'video of the week' when it first appeared.

3.   Joullié, J.-E. 2005. Le dangereux mythe du leader charismatique'. *Les Échos*, 23/08.

Enseignement

<u>Depuis septembre 2021 :</u> Professeur de management, École de Management Léonard de Vinci, Paris La Défense

<u>Septembre 2015 – Juillet 2021 :</u> Associate Professor, Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait – College of Business Administration

<u>Mars 2008 – Juin 2015 :</u> Senior Lecturer, International College of Management, Sydney.

Service à la communauté

- 2019 – current: *Relations Industrielles / Industrial Relations*: Editorial Board member.
- 2020 – current: *Journal of Management History*: Editorial Advisory Board member.
- 2017 – current: *Academy of Management Learning and Education*: reviewer.

Récompenses

- 2019 *Journal of Management History* Best Reviewer Award
- 2013 ICMS Academic Achievement Award.
- 2012 ICMS Innovation in Teaching Excellence Award.
- 2011 ICMS Teaching Excellence Award.

Annexe 2 : Publications mentionnées dans le mémoire

2.1 : The philosopher and the manager

The philosopher and the manager

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Abstract: This paper revisits the argument that management academics and managers benefit from being knowledgeable in Western philosophy. Salient debates in management research and education that have emerged over the last decades are first summarised. The theoretical uncertainties that these debates have highlighted are then located within a brief overview of mainstream Western philosophical traditions. Philosophical investigations into management theory help discern the origins of some of the difficulties that plague management theories, paving the way towards their clarification and resolution.

Keywords: philosophy; management; rationalism; empiricism; romanticism; existentialism.

Biographical notes: Jean-Etienne Joullié teaches philosophy to management and business students at the International College of Management, Sydney, Australia, where he also heads the Centre for Applied Research in Professional Services Management. Before committing to academia, he worked as an electrical engineer in Europe and Asia Pacific. He holds an MSc in Electrical Engineering, an MBA and a PhD in Philosophy.

1   Introduction

This journal has been established on the conviction that those who study or practise management benefit from philosophical investigations into the makeup of management concepts. Although anecdotal evidence attests to its positive reception within a few circles, one has to admit that this contention is still to be shared by a wider academic audience. As best as I could determine, rare are the management schools (such as my institution) that propose courses in philosophy as part of their core curricula. More importantly, while management, as a social group or as an activity, has been analysed using models borrowed from psychology, sociology and philosophy, little has been published as far as management theory is concerned. This restraint is surprising, for notable theoretical debates animating the management literature have been fuelled by contributions using in some cases explicit philosophical language (for example, one of Powell's controversial articles is entitled 'Strategy Without Ontology'; Powell, 2003). It appears then opportune to revisit some of these debates and to locate the difficulties

they highlight in the context of a brief philosophical overview. Not only does this exercise illustrate how mainstream management theories, their foundations and the problems that derive therefrom can be engaged from a philosophical perspective, but, more generally, it also shows how rewarding philosophical considerations can be for those who study and teach management.

2   Salient debates within management theory and education

Criticisms of management as an academic discipline and body of knowledge have echoed in the literature for some time. Critics question the relevance of management education and management research, their outcomes, their internal consistency and the validity of some of their theoretical underpinnings.

For some commentators, the value of management education is questionable. In 1971, Livingston argued that academic achievement was irrelevant to practising or aspiring managers since it did not measure the skills that are important to managerial success such as leading, developing or working with people. He analysed management education as insisting on analytic problem solving at the expense of opportunity identification skills. Further, for Livingston, the very existence of management education leads management students to assume that there is one best way to manage in all situations and conveys the idea that, by the time they graduate, management students know all they need to know. If 'education' refers to what management schools deliver and measure, Livingston insisted, the "well-educated manager is a myth" (Livingston, 1971, p.33). Three decades after Livingston, Pfeffer and Fong reiterated much of these criticisms (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002). They contended that if practitioners influence management academics, the opposite is far from evident: in their view, management research has little, if any, demonstrable impact on management practise. Even though Pfeffer and Fong concluded their discussion on an optimistic note, they warned that management education has to change to remain relevant. Voices from outside academia acquiesced, dismissing management theory for being inconsequential 'inane' (Stewart, 2006) 'gobbledygook' (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 1996, p.12). In a later article, Pfeffer further held that management research has to be scientific in its methods and empirical in its underpinnings (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006, pp.62–75). Rousseau and McCarthy (2007) agreed, insisting that management education, good management education that is, is evidence-based and aims at disseminating the successful practises uncovered by management academics.

Another group of commentators indicted management education for corrupting the moral worth of management students. They argued that, by insisting that analytical skills are the only ones that matter, management academia fosters superficial leadership behaviour on the part of graduates convinced that management situations are like case studies that can be summarised in a few pages and addressed in a few hours. In contributions that disprove the often-heard complaint that management literature is dry and devoid of passion, management schools have been accused of elevating short-term, materialistic and hubristic 'winner-takes-all' values above humanistic ones (Giacalone, 2004; Mintzberg, 2004). After the Enron, Tyco and WorldCom scandals of the early 2000s which sparked the first articles, the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 has revived what is now a fertile theme. In a noted article, Podolny went as far as holding business schools solely responsible for the subprime debacle for teaching their students arrogance

and greed at the expense of moral considerations (Podolny, 2009; see also Haynes, 2010). A sweeping and perhaps excessive analysis; not every management student turns into an arrogant manager. Irrespective of the merits or demerits of this second group of views, however, one (and possibly self-serving) of their unstated assumptions is that management education, contrary to what Livingston, Pfeffer and Fong contended, does have a determining influence, albeit not a desirable one.

A third line of criticism is detectable in the literature. It has been ignited by Donaldson, who argued the existence of contradictions between contents of mainstream management theories and management education itself (Donaldson, 2002). According to Donaldson, economics and finance theorists assume that, in efficient markets, prices of goods and equities include all available information; superior rate of returns can only be obtained on the basis on information that is not available publicly. Yet one of the purposes of management academia is to research and make public information about products or equities. Donaldson concluded that "knowledge made publicly available through management education cannot assist its students to better play [the] markets" (Donaldson, 2002, pp.98–99). Moreover, if business success results from rare, non-substitutable and inimitable resources and barriers obtained from exceptional, complex or even causally ambiguous conditions (as the Resource-Based View of the firm holds), then managers, no matter how well educated, cannot reproduce business success. In any case, if organisational success comes from the careful development of skills and systems that are unique to the organisation, then identifying and teaching these skills and systems is self-contradicting, for by being more common these features lose their interest. Donaldson's view is hence that not only "being educated in the RBV gives [managers] little guidance about how to attain competitive advantage", but also that "knowledge-based sustained competitive advantage is incompatible with management education" (Donaldson, 2002, p.99, 100, respectively).

Donaldson extended his criticisms to agency theory and institutional theory in more indirect if no less indicting terms. Agency theory posits that managers are driven by their own interests, as opposed to those of the organisation's owners. Now since managers' agendas are promoted by whatever new knowledge they can gain, the case for management education appears dubious: being more knowledgeable, managers will be more destructive. Institutional theory describes organisations as mostly irrational entities ruled by rituals and an overarching eagerness for conformity. This view also undermines the general case for management education, for, if valid, educational outcomes are bound to be either ignored altogether when seen as disruptive, or used to reinforce the *status quo* when not. Donaldson's overall conclusion was that management schools should reduce, at least qualify, the place of economics, finance, strategy theory, agency theory and institutional theory in their curricula (Donaldson, 2002, pp.103–105).

Completing the charge sheet, other commentators have highlighted the existence of weaknesses within management theory. In a series of noted articles, Powell analysed the notion of competitive advantage as being unfalsifiable and tautologous, lacking of theoretical interest (Powell, 2001, 2002, 2003). In its simplest expression, Powell's indictment runs as follows: since competitive advantages are only identified within successful organisations, they cannot, in and by themselves, explain these organisations' success. Saying that an organisation is successful because it has one or several competitive advantages amounts to saying that the organisation is successful because it is successful: true no doubt, but not helpful. Competitive advantage theory is then reduced to a mere 'way of seeing' (Powell, 2001, p.885). Although vigorously disputed in the

literature, Powell's arguments have been recently found to withstand critical scrutiny and to remain in need of a convincing answer (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010, pp.356–358). Should the totem of competitive advantage fall or be substantially weakened, one wonders what would be left standing of strategy theory and beyond it of management academia: the assumption that identifiable and reproducible management practises have positive, if only temporary, effects is consubstantial to management research and education. Even Donaldson accepted this view (see Donaldson (2002, pp.103–104) for instance).

Before Donaldson voiced his arguments, the need for a cross-discipline synthesis within management education had been patent for a long time. It is for instance difficult to conceive of consumers behaving rationally, as economics or game theory assume, while at the same time being driven by an overall pleasure principle, as important parts of marketing and buyer behaviour theories allege they are: a pleasure principle doubtlessly knows little of demand vs. supply equilibria. Besides, if organisations are by nature irrational entities (as institutional theory proposes), teaching managers cold and dispassionate analytical and project management skills (as *all* management schools pride themselves on doing) is unlikely to do them (or their employers) any good. Even within the general management literature, some long-standing tensions have been difficult to overlook. While some authors hold that only employee contribution matters and that using psychology in the workplace is a repugnant and self-defeating form of tyranny (Drucker, 1974, pp.243–244), many industrial psychologists insist after Maslow that managers must understand the psychological needs of their subordinates. Most commentators promote analysis of facts before decision making but others like Tom Peters are adamant that greatness comes from a relentless, passionate and thus irrational pursuit of excellence. There are rare advocates of unscrupulous usage of power in management in the name of effectiveness while the majority insists on the importance of ethics and compassion in the workplace. One could also mention more arcane arguments about the best ways to motivate employees or the disputes surrounding the use of psychological tests for the selection and promotion of employees. All these discussions, although started decades ago, are still alive today and their resolutions, despite the efforts of management academics the world over, are nowhere in sight.

The on-going debates thus encompass existential interrogations ("Do management research and education matter? Do management theory and education not contradict themselves?"), ethical considerations ("What is the moral worth of management education?") as well as lethal epistemological questions ("Is competitive advantage theory a theory at all?"). For management academia, the stakes could hardly be higher. In his last article that sounded like a *mea culpa*, the late Sumantra Ghoshal encapsulated all these interrogations perhaps more poignantly than anyone before or since (Ghoshal, 2005). He argued that management academics erred gravely ever since they decided to place themselves under the protection of science, which, for being prestigious, led them to seek explanations in terms of laws. This, Ghoshal held, reduced management theory "to a kind of physics" that analyses the phenomena it studies in terms of causes and effects (Ghoshal, 2005, p.77). The scientific bias, argued Ghoshal, left no room for conceptions like intentionality, choice or resilience and for aesthetical and moral values. Employees had to be levelled down to the status of inanimate economic resources for the sake of calculability and mathematical modelling (Ghoshal, 2005, pp.80, 86). Ghoshal insisted: after a half-century of research based on ideological preconceptions advanced as natural truths, management academia had only achieved "the pretense of knowledge"

(Ghoshal, 2005, p.77). If management truly was a physical science, all this would be harmless, even amusing – that for centuries the Sun was deemed to rotate around the Earth never changed anything to what the Sun actually does. However, Ghoshal warned, the reverse was in fact the case: "social scientists carry [a] greater social and moral responsibility than those who work in the physical sciences because, if they hide ideology in the pretense of science, they can cause much more harm" owing to the self-fulfilling power of social theories that have gained wide currency (Ghoshal, 2005, p.87). On independent but similar grounds, Bennis and O'Toole concurred: for them, management schools have long suffered from 'physics envy', which have led them to embrace scientific rigour at the expense of every other form of knowledge (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005, p.98). A field that was once castigated for its constitutional incapability of criticising itself (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 1996, p.12) has certainly come a long way.

3 The case for Western philosophy

Management academia thus appears marked by an overall lack of clarity about what it is or should be about and the body of knowledge it pretends to advance seems plagued by serious internal controversies; one wonders what a newcomer to the arena can make of such confusion. If it is really the case, as Livingston, Donaldson, Powell, Ghoshal, Bennis, O'Toole and others argued, that management theory and education are mired in intractable contradictions flowing from incorrect conceptions, then some serious re-thinking is called for and urgently so. The predicament goes well beyond what the traditional management disciplines can, on their own, address. For all involved, the need to step back and take stock seems today more pressing than ever. As a first step, one can attempt to clarify the issues broached above and expose their origins. It is only when their foundations would have been exposed and a shared understanding about their origins arrived at that a reconstruction effort will be conceivable in earnest. Philosophy is the discipline of choice for this enterprise.

That there is value for management academics to engage in philosophy is not a new finding: it is the reason the current journal exists after all. The last 15 years have seen the emergence of a small but slowly growing body of literature arguing a similar line. Through a series of collected essays, Lynch and Dicker have attempted to "unit[e] philosophy and public administration" by showing that the foundations of organisation theory had discernible philosophical origins (Lynch and Dicker, 1998 p.iii). In the inaugural article of the *Philosophy and Management Journal*, editors Laurie and Cherry envisioned the scope of their publication to include philosophical explorations of the tenets of management theory and practise, of managerial ideologies, methods and language (Laurie and Cherry, 2001). They also pleaded management pundits and practitioners to learn from philosophy to address more effectively their daily duties and challenges. In a similar vein, commentators have argued for the development of philosophically-grounded managerial and entrepreneurial wisdom (Rowley, 2006; see also Rowley and Slack, 2009 as well as Certo and Certo, 2010). The benefits that are said to accrue from such endeavours include a deeper and better grasp of the complexity of management reality and more generally improved creative and critical thinking skills, flowing from a richer and more accurate usage of language (Small, 2006). Commentators have also made the case for philosophy courses to be included in management curricula

to ground students' sense of moral duty (Small, 2004a, 2004b); events of the kind philosophers experienced during their lifetime are perhaps irrelevant today, Small contended, but their ideas are not. Some have taken these recommendations to the letter and have sought help from professional philosophers to address actual sensitive management situations (see de Borchgrave, 2006, pp.197–214 for a practical example).

To the extent that management theory, like much of science in general and social science in particular, is of Western descent, it must be analysed in light of the various layers that are woven in the fabric of Western thinking. Put differently, to understand management thought, to be able to uncover its underpinnings and the contradictions these lead to, one must first understand Western thought. This is not to say that Eastern philosophy has nothing to contribute to management; this is merely saying that Eastern thinking has had little, if any influence on modern management thought and education. For this reason, the study of Oriental philosophy, an enterprise obviously valuable in and of itself, is unlikely to point to solutions to the problems outlined above (for a study of the relevance of Oriental philosophy to economics and organisation theory in general and an attempt at conceiving of Buddhist economics in particular, see Schumacher, 1973, Part I, Ch. 4).

The contention that management thought benefits from being analysed through the lens of Western philosophical traditions can be illustrated in general terms, be it at the price of generalisation and simplification.

Management authors who insist that employees are to be managed solely on the basis of their performance measured against the objectives they had been assigned to, are indebted to an ancient worldview, the oldest one in the history of Western thinking. This worldview is visible in the heroic poems of Homer, in which human existence is contingent to strict adherence to roles to which are attached rules and rewards. In the heroic perspective, individuals are reduced to and evaluated based on their actions, irrespective of their intentions. Only results matter and might is right. Promotion to rulership is open only to those warriors who excel in meeting their peers' expectations while those who fail in their responsibilities are eliminated in the hands of their peers. Perform or be slain – in today's management parlance: perform or be fired.

Commentators who consider that power within organisations is a means as well as an end in itself and that organisational strength is the primary objective of CEOs write in the shadow of a towering political theorist. Niccolò Machiavelli considered the power of the State to be the only guarantee of its citizens' freedom and prosperity in a world where man was man's greatest enemy. For the Florentine secretary, State power started with that of its head; legitimacy of the ruler was none of his concerns: whoever made it to the top was legitimate. His lessons for managers are transparent enough: build a team, eliminate poor performers early on, protect those who can help, crush those who stand in the way, destroy victorious generals before they become too ambitious, go into battle carefully but always fight to win. While failure will never be forgiven, success justifies the means (a rich theme; see for example Julius et al., 1999). If Machiavelli is right, Donaldson's concerns about institutional theory can be relativised. It would appear indeed that a CEO's agenda, even if seemingly selfish, always aligns with that of his (or her: Machiavelli praised many a female leader for their cunning and determination) organisation since the power of the former feeds that of the latter. Machiavelli further held that if Christian values were a hindrance to the leader's objectives, they were to be dispensed with altogether. Friedrich Nietzsche pushed this objection to Christian ethics further: for him, nothing of enduring value will ever come out of the Christian morals,

which he analysed as being of slavish origins, only suitable for the weak-willed, the meek and submissive 'herd'. According to him, 'higher men', that is to say strong-willed and powerful individuals, must be allowed to flourish, for the future of Western culture rests on their shoulders. This extreme view reverberates in the works of authors who insist that leaders are born, not made (see for instance, Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991).

Opposing this line of thinking, writers who promote formal education as basis for selection and promotion of employees have had the core of their arguments outlined some 24 centuries ago. Plato argued indeed that rulership is to be granted to those with superior rational faculties. He differentiated these rulers from their brave, loyal but intellectually limited auxiliaries destined to execute orders. For Plato, reason cannot lead to errors and its exercise is the only way to truth. Rulers' rational skills are to be honed through education in literature, history, logic, mathematics and rhetoric. To that purpose, Plato founded in 387 BC what can be considered as the first ever management school, The Academy, as a place to lecture and study moral and political questions.

Pursuing the rationalist tradition, René Descartes considered that his ability to think was evidence for his own existence and represented the primary example of those 'clear and distinct ideas' upon which knowledge is to be built. If Descartes is correct, management is not entirely amenable to empirical study since managers must base their decisions on what they take to be self-evident truths. In this context, the debates regarding the origin and possible replication of competitive advantages lose much of their relevance, for success in management (and in life more generally) would ultimately spring from the inner world of executives (Kets de Vries, 2009). In an attempt to curtail the extremes that can flow from the mysticism of revealed insights, other authors have turned to 20th century philosophy of science. They insist, like Karl Popper did, that scientificity is refutability (Miller and Tsang, 2010). Propositions, be they management theories or business strategies, must be, at least in principle, amenable to empirical falsification or else be dismissed for being mere tautologies. Put differently, theories that cannot be falsified explain everything but predict nothing; they are of no use to managers (Moss, 2003). Powell's indictment that competitive advantage theory commits the sin of unfalsifiability resonates in this debate.

Authors who consider, conversely, that ideas come exclusively from experience inscribe themselves in the tradition initiated by the works of John Locke and David Hume. Refuting the notion of self-evident truths as a dangerous illusion, these philosophers considered the human mind to be a blank slate at birth. Knowledge is thus, strictly, empirical knowledge. In this outline, science is to proceed as per an inductive-deductive model according to which conjectured regularities are tested against observations to arrive at the formulation of laws. When this approach, prevalent in the natural sciences, is considered as the alpha and the omega of all intellectual endeavours and is expanded to social sciences, its consequences are striking. Management is to be evidence-based, that is, it should start exclusively from facts and incorporate the best available scientific findings. Management research itself becomes an exercise in empirical data gathering to arrive at 'laws of management'. These then allow predictions of organisational outcomes, paving the way towards greater profits. Yet, if management is a science, then organisations, their managers, employees, suppliers and customers behave and must behave according to fixed and immutable patterns, the laws that management researchers are to discover. No room in this vision for the notions of freedom, choice, morality and responsibility; employees are reduced to mechanical actions. Their behaviour is comparable to that of billiard-balls set in motion by the right

incentives like sunflowers are irresistibly attracted by the sun. Common sense, at least its Human Resource Management version, says indeed that employees are to be motivated and that motivation is "the set of forces that *causes* people to engage in one behavior rather than some alternative behaviour" (Griffin and Moorhead, 2012, p.90, emphasis added). After Ghoshal, one feels justified in wondering whether a management science, assuming it to be possible, is really desirable.

On a not incompatible note, a substantial component of managerial psychology assumes that employees behave according to their personalities. This concept is presented as a natural essence, quality or substratum that determines or at least influences human behaviour, consciously or unconsciously. Whatever personality is, it must be inferred from observed or self-reported behaviour (nobody can claim to be able to observe it directly); yet it is said to be measurable with some degree of validity. This assessment is of great interest to recruiters and managers generally, since it is meant to lead to predictions about performance at work. To the extent that measurements of personality are accessible to the specialist, managers should receive psychological training or assistance (or better still, be psychologists themselves) before making decisions, especially with regard to hiring or promoting staff (for an expansion of such views to psychoanalysis, see for instance, Menzies-Lyth (1990) or Gutmann and Iarussi, 2003). Similarly, psychiatry's foundational assumption is that the mind can be affected by pathologies manifested in abnormal behaviour. Accordingly, staffing decisions and performance appraisals benefit from psychiatric diagnoses (Godkin and Allcorn, 2009).

Psychology and psychiatry-informed authors are, however, opposed by writers who consider personal freedom to choose as an axiom of human existence. Recognising themselves heirs of existentialist thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre or Thomas Szasz, these authors consider that psychological determinism is a demeaning position absolving man of his obligations. They reject the concept of personal structuring, be it of a psychological, psychiatric or other nature (Spillane, 2009, p.244ff). In their view, employees always retain a degree of self-control and have to accept the responsibility of their actions, insofar as they could predict their consequences. Managers' attempts at maximising their freedom while minimising their responsibility are accordingly analysed as childish and self-defeating. As adults, managers should welcome the anxiety that inalienable responsible freedom generates as proving ground of their maturity. Motivation can only mean manipulation. Management theorists should not be paralysed at the thought that their theories will never be formally proven. To act, one must be able to make predictions; in other words, to act, one must have a theory. That this theory cannot be logically established is no reason for not taking action: not doing anything would be unreasonable. Although demanding and tough-minded, this body of ideas remains optimistic and poetic, since it insists that individuals and their ideas are seen as the seeds of unlimited possibilities (Spillane and Martin, 2005, pp.18–19, 93–95).

Early formulations of this line of thinking can be identified in 19th century romanticism. Refusing the supremacy and universalism of reason and objectivity promoted by Enlightenment philosophers, romantic thinkers like Fichte or Schopenhauer rejected the view that rationality (which they saw as cold) or empirical investigations (described as petty) should guide human existence. Instead, they extolled the unlimited power of the human will, which they saw as an indomitable source of energy, shaping the world and creating values whenever it acts and encounters resistance. For them, reason has nothing to say on human goals and is only concerned with the calculation of means. Science has failed since it cannot explain freedom yet freedom is a fact. The romantic

hero is the creator, the artist, not the scientist. This body of ideas is perceptible in the works of management academics for which management cannot be a science, not even a profession (Mintzberg, 1990; Barker, 2010). Management 'gurus' like Tom Peters of Jim Collins agree: they see in management a creative endeavour, a passionate quest for excellence and greatness and not a rational undertaking, suitable only for bureaucracies. Managers are to impose their personal vision and values on chaotic organisations like painters on a blank canvass. Growth and innovation become exercises in determination; markets opportunities arise not out of detached five-force analyses but out of resolute overpowering of the resistance of competitors.

There would be considerably more to say on all these matters, calling in the discussion many other names and ideas. For all that, one must concede that relatively little has been published explicitly on the general theme pursued here beyond the few books and articles referenced earlier (other notable exceptions are Chia and Morgan (1996), Chia (2002), Türengül (2007) or Girin (2011)). A systematic review of the long-running philosophical issues that surface in management theory is still lacking today. From one end, it is as if management academics have been reluctant to engage in a discipline in which presumably they have not been formerly trained. From the other end, badge-carrying philosophers have developed very little interest in management concerns. Despites the efforts of a few, the barriers between management and philosophy seem as high as ever. One obvious exception to these observations is the field of 'business ethics', about which contributions and courses abound, especially so when the expression includes (as it usually does) 'corporate social responsibility', 'equal opportunity', 'employee rights', 'consumer protection' and related matters. Whatever its exact content, the phrase 'business ethics' has the merit of drawing an explicit connection between management (both as theory and practise) and philosophical concerns, ethics being one of the traditional areas of philosophical investigations. Providing theoretical grounds to managerial values is an endeavour that has received substantial attention in the management literature, with prominent figures like Aristotle, Kant, Bentham or J.S. Mill routinely called in support. Being older than the 'philosophy and management' trend mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, however, the existence and vitality of this body of literature owes little, if anything, to that theme, even if some business ethicists have since sought to locate their contributions under the auspice of philosophy.

4 Studying management, philosophically

To the philosophically-trained eye, management theory looks like a tapestry, with evidence of intellectual traditions woven together and forming a complex motif. Great oppositions that mark the history of Western philosophy echo directly or indirectly in disagreements between management authors. One cannot consistently consider employees as human resources consciously or unconsciously motivated (in the HRM, i.e., causal, sense mentioned above) by management techniques or by their psychological structure yet capable of innovation and moral decisions. This is the freedom vs. determinism argument, still to be settled. While not providing direct solutions or recommendations to the closing of the debates broached above, philosophical investigations into management thought clarify the assumptions underlying these debates. Genuine innovations in management theory are extremely rare, just as they have been in Western thought. What many management authors do, knowingly or not, is to isolate one

thread and present it as forming either the dominating or most interesting pattern of the entire fabric.

Philosophy does not so much teach knowledge (which of course it does, since it teaches philosophical concepts and terms) than understanding. Without understanding there cannot be knowledge: "what a man does not understand, he does not possess" wrote Goethe. One really knows a concept or a theory when one understands where it starts and where it stops, in other words when one is able to argue against it. Be it in management research, education or practise, genuine understanding consists in recognising one's own biases and agendas hidden behind one's apparent detached objectivity. Without this critical ability, students, academics and managers alike remain the slaves of their prejudices and unrecognised contradictions, of the orders they receive from above or of the bottom line. They are bound to become the robotic executants of a management framework reduced to a technical perspective. Managerialism looms large. By uncovering the cornerstones upon which Western thought has been built, philosophical analyses of management theory are remedies to the 'miseducation' that Livingston diagnosed 40 years ago and that Ghoshal articulated so vividly.

To philosophise is to think critically over thinking. To manage is to direct people, including oneself, towards the achievement of objectives. These objectives, as well as the way they are to be met, have to be justified. These justifications are significant not only for what they lead to, but also for what they assume. While there does not seem to be any authoritative criterion upon which one could decide which philosophical worldview, among those that developed over the history of Western thought, is superior, this dilemma is not a paralysing one. If one is to live, one is to act and if one is to act, one is to choose. Yet one's choices are meaningless if one does not understand the assumptions underpinning them. Management is impossible in the absence of philosophical references, in the darkness of an imprecise language or in the senseless outline of a world without intellectual perspective. Managing is an applied philosophical activity.

Philosophers and managers reputedly live on different planets. The former are said to speculate and to contemplate, the latter to act and decide. The first ones do not know anything of organisations, even less of business, the second ones have no time for abstract ideas but are solely interested in obtaining results; most philosophers wrote in times long past but managers are exclusively interested in the here and now. Even their languages are supposedly different: while philosophers speak classic Greek or German, managers communicate in 'managementese', this impoverished version of English that has become the Esperanto of a globalised economy. As this cliché goes, their encounter is both unlikely and pointless. The foregoing has hopefully dispelled it.

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2.2 : The philosophical foundations of management thought

The Philosophical Foundations of Management Thought

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I argue that managers, management academics, and management students benefit from being knowledgeable in Western philosophy. To that effect, a survey of six major themes of Western philosophy is offered: heroism, rationalism, positivism, romanticism, existentialism, and postmodernism. This survey reveals that the dominating themes taught in management schools have recognizable philosophical origins: Power in human relationships is a heroic concept; the case for management education is of rationalist descent; and the conviction that research is to be a value-free, inductive enterprise is a legacy of positivism. Further, the importance of innovation is a romantic theme; accepting one's personal responsibility for one's decisions is a distinctively existentialist demand; and the idea that the world and human existence are without firm foundations is the dominating message of postmodernism. Knowingly or not, in one way or another, all important management authors inscribe themselves in at least one of these traditions. No management education is complete if it is not anchored in their understanding.

The last 15 years have seen the emergence of a small but slowly growing body of literature arguing that management academics, management students, and managers benefit from being knowledgeable in philosophy. Among the precursors, Lynch and Dicker (1998: iii) attempted to show in a series of collected essays that administration thought and philosophy could be united. In a related vein, Laurie and Cherry (2001) encouraged management pundits to explore the tenets of management theory and practice by analyzing managerial ideologies and language through a philosophical lens. The journal they founded the same year to that purpose is now called the *Philosophy of Management Journal*; in 2004, the *International Journal of Management Concepts and Philosophy* was established with comparable intentions. Arguing that no knowledge creation could take place outside of a philosophical framework, Chia (2002) offered a review of the

philosophical underpinnings of management research. Managers have been encouraged to engage with philosophy, on the grounds that it develops managerial wisdom, deepens one's understanding of the complexity of management life, and improves creative and critical thinking skills (Chia & Morgan, 1996; Small, 2004a, 2004b, 2006). Heeding these recommendations, executives have asked professional philosophers to help them analyze and address sensitive situations (de Borchgrave, 2006: 97–214). Independently of these developments, the long-existing business ethics literature draws abundantly from philosophy and offers countless philosophically inspired advice.

In this essay, I return to Lynch and Dicker's agenda with a view of expanding it to management thought. I contend that concepts that are the bread and butter of management academics have direct, if often unrecognized, philosophical foundations. This contention has two notable consequences. First, management schools should concern themselves with these foundations, for those who have an interest in management thought will only be able to grasp and communicate its full meaning if they appreciate its underlying worldviews and its consequences. Second, if management thought is

a manifestation of philosophical thought, then controversies that regularly surface in the management literature must be analyzed in the terms of their philosophical origins, because their frustrating irreducibility is a manifestation of the incompatibility of the philosophical assumptions that underpin them.

To the extent that management thought is of Western descent (all major management writers are Westerners), the origins of what is taught in management schools must be sought in Western philosophy. This is not to insinuate that Eastern philosophy is not worthy of interest for whoever studies management. Quite the reverse; the fact remains, however, that with the possible exception of Sun Tzu's *Art of War* (McNeilly, 2011), Eastern thinking has had no demonstrable influence on mainstream management concepts.

The argument I offer here is structured as follows: After some remarks justifying its structure, a simplified historic–thematic overview of major themes of Western philosophy is proposed, in which the philosophical lineages of salient management concepts are highlighted. This overview is not exhaustive but suffices to show that management thought forms a complex jigsaw puzzle, one which cannot be assembled into a neat, meaningful, and reassuring picture but can still be partially ordered along a few important if irreconcilable philosophical themes. A discussion on the consequences of this finding and on the practical value of philosophy to managers, management students, and management academics is offered as a conclusion, which signposts directions for future research.

PHILOSOPHY FOR MANAGERS

In his *magnum opus*, English philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1978: 39) commented that European philosophy is best characterized as a series of footnotes to Plato. If this is the case, then a necessarily brief survey of Western thought must focus on those major movements of thought that either predate (so as to provide context), agree, or disagree most directly with Plato's philosophy. Six important philosophical themes have hence been retained: heroism (the dominating worldview before Plato); rationalism (the branch of philosophy that started in earnest with Plato); positivism (a philosophy that dismisses many of rationalism's assumptions); romanticism (a philosophy that rejects both rationalism and positivism); existentialism (an actualized outgrowth of romanticism); and postmodernism (the

West's latest output, which also rejects the Platonic tradition). Why other important philosophies have not been reviewed is justified later.

The thematic–historic review of Western philosophy proposed below is summarized in Table 1 along six dimensions: The important themes of the philosophies discussed, what they mean for an individual committed to them (their psychological emphasis), and how these themes and emphases translate in management thought and from a manager's perspective. Representative philosophers of each philosophy are provided, and the corresponding management authors mentioned in the article are also listed. I appreciate that classifying Fichte and Nietzsche as romantic philosophers will be tantamount to heresy for some readers and that reducing three millennia of Western thinking into a six-by-six table will seem laughable to others. If Table 1 aimed at exactitude, both charges would be justified; this is not the case, however, because Table 1 below is only offered as a rough-and-ready roadmap to help navigate what is a very rich body of ideas. A further warning: The length of the section below will presumably test readers' patience, but it is important to provide a reasonable account of each philosophy for the conclusions of the article to be acceptable. Connections between philosophical concepts and well-known management themes are regularly provided throughout the exposition; familiarity with the latter will hopefully facilitate understanding of the former and ease what I recognize is a dense reading.

Heroism

Heroism, the worldview that emerges from Homer's poems, is the mandatory starting point for anyone interested in the historical development of Western thinking. From the text of the *Iliad* (Lattimore, 1961), the story it tells, and the actions of its main protagonists, it is possible to reconstruct in valuable terms how Western man, some 3,000 years ago, conceived of his existence and of the world in which he lived. These conceptions are not limited to Ancient Greece and Western man; they pervaded Bushido Japan, Viking-Age (7th to 11th century) Scandinavia, and 8th century Celtic Ireland, all cultures characterized by an emphasis on nobility, courage, fortitude, warring skill, honor, and commitment to standards (MacIntyre, 2007: 121–130).

To modern eyes, *heroism* is the ability to swim against the tide and to defy expectations to create new ones, with all the risks this entails to personal survival and social stability; *ancient heroism*

TABLE 1
Summary of Major Philosophical Themes and Their Emergence in Management Thought

Philosophy	Representative author(s)	Important themes	Psychological emphasis	Corresponding themes in management thought	Manager's emphasis	Noted management author(s)
Heroism	Homer; Niccolò Machiavelli; Friedrich Nietzsche	Roles; rules; rewards; power; performance.	Perform!	Management by objectives; performance; training; results.	Skills	Peter Drucker
Rationalism	Plato; René Descartes; Karl Popper	Reason; rulership as a body of knowledge; truth; deduction; universals.	I deduct	Managers to be educated; insights; analysis; planning.	Analysis	Michael Porter
Positivism	David Hume; Auguste Comte	Facts; laws; induction; determinism.	I induct	Positivism is the current dominating worldview within management academia.	Evidence	Herbert Simon
Romanticism	Johann Gottlieb Fichte; Friedrich Nietzsche	Will; inspiration; passion; resistance; subjectivity.	I will	Resilience, innovation; creativity; entrepreneurship.	Determination	Tom Peters
Existentialism	Jean-Paul Sartre	'I'; freedom; responsibility.	I am free and responsible	decision making; authority; independence.	Autonomy	Chester Barnard
Postmodernism	Michel Foucault; Paul Feyerabend; Jean Baudrillard	Narratives; knowledge as socially constructed; absence of foundations; interpretation; language games.	I am without certainties	Multiculturalism; managers as leaders; organizational culture; change management; Critical Management Studies.	Story telling	John Kotter

consists in the exact opposite. In (ancient) heroic societies, individuals are defined by their roles, to which are attached expectations of performance, rules of behavior, and rewards when results are forthcoming. Intentions and feelings are irrelevant, only results matter. Might is right: Heroism is a philosophy of power expressed through action. Heroes are those characters who have excelled in meeting the social expectations placed upon them. In Homer's poems, promotion to rulership is reserved to whomever has triumphed on the battlefield. Warriors are to be brave and resourceful in battle, young men bold and impulsive, old men wise and prudent, women beautiful, chaste, and faithful. These virtues are not something for the *Iliad*'s characters to like or dislike or from which they could distance themselves because heroic existence is defined by the recognition peers afford. Those who fail in their responsibilities surrender their right to exist and are dealt with accordingly at the hands of their friends or enemies. Running in fear before the terrifying Achilles, Hector, Troy's champion, has become "a dog" (Lattimore, 1961: 444); escaping with her lover, Helen, former queen of Sparta, is now, in her own words, a "bitch" (1961: 162). A strong sense of purpose animates the characters of the *Iliad*. For the Achaeans, Troy must fall and Helen be returned; for the Trojans, the besiegers must be pushed back to the sea. When this clarity of purpose weakens in the face of adversity, even the most formidable heroes call to the gods in despair. This desperation is understandable: Without an overall goal, heroic life becomes inexplicable, absurd even, since without it, the entire edifice of roles, rules, and rewards collapses.

Homer had no words and hence no concept for "self," "mind," "soul," or "personality"; heroic man is body and behavior, that is, body and body only (Snell,

1982: 8–12). Although the various characters differ from one another and are insistently so described, Homer did not see them as inhabited by a puppet master pulling strings of behavior. No distinction is made in the poem between doer and deed, between action and actor: One is strictly what one does. This lack of psychological substratum is coherent with the observation that Homer's characters do not, indeed cannot, strive for self-affirmation as the modern conception of heroism implies, but only can strive for social recognition. Heroic societies are inherently stable; the price to pay for a culture of excellence according to exacting standards is the unquestioned perpetuation of traditions. To wit, heroism enjoyed an exceptional longevity: It was the dominating world-view from at least the time one of the earliest texts known, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, was written (between 2800 and 2500 BC; Dalley, 1989: 40) until the days of Homer (9th to 7th centuries BC).

Authors who describe management as a task, structured by codified practices and entailing clear responsibilities can thus hardly make a claim to originality. Underpinning Peter Drucker's (1989: 122) "Management by Objectives and Self-Control" (MBO) framework is the conviction that managers are to focus on what the job—as opposed to the boss—requires. For Drucker (1974: 243–244), to ask of managers to probe the personalities of their colleagues is not only morally repugnant and counterproductive, it is also to ask them to lose sight of what really matters: contribution to the overall goal of the organization. For the organization to operate and be more than the collection of its individual employees, a common language is required. This, Drucker held, is possible only through the definition and enforcement of unambiguous objectives supported by workmanship standards. Without objectives, none of management's basic tasks (planning, delegation, performance measurement, decision making, employee development, etc.) is possible, and no leadership can ever take place. Objectives are neither given nor self-evident; setting them is precisely what managing is about. As for seeing them through, Drucker (1989: 145) was straightforward: Poor performance cannot be tolerated and consistently nonperforming employees have to be dismissed. Homer's heroes had to perform or be slain; Drucker's managers have to perform or be fired.

"Homer's heroes had to perform or be slain; Drucker's managers have to perform or be fired."

Management by objectives inherits heroism's Achilles' heel. Drucker repeatedly emphasized the importance of innovation throughout his books; given the premises of MBO though, one fails to see how it can be possible (Roth, 2009). Innovation means risk taking, and risk taking means the possibility of failure, yet the latter is as intolerable within MBO as it is in the *Iliad*. Similarly, even though Drucker (1974: 45–46) was adamant that managers should strive for effectiveness more than for efficiency, the latter is more likely to be the outcome of MBO; at best, one can expect refinements. Drucker's lifetime passion for Japan and his persistent praise of continuous improvement, Japanese style, illustrate this weakness of his arguments. If many technological improvements as well as efficient management techniques have come from Japan, genuinely innovative products or business practices are not parts of this country's otherwise rich legacy. Little surprise here, in that Japan is still marked by its recent heroic, Bushido style past (Drucker's "heroism" receives a more complete development in Joullié & Spillane, 2015).

Drucker was not the first one to make (implicitly) the case for a return to a heroic worldview. As far as the running of organizations goes, he was preceded by a political theorist with a sulphurous reputation: Niccolò Machiavelli (1995). Revolted by the political decomposition of Renaissance Italy and isolated in his study after having lost his senior position within the Florentine administration, Machiavelli did not hesitate in his arguments, writing advice he thought would be appreciated by statesmen. His objective: unite and restore his country to imperial glory. His models: Rome and Ancient Greece, for him unrivalled examples of human achievement. Just as the foundation of Rome required the murder of Remus, success can demand extreme sacrifice. Men, being "ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers" (Machiavelli, 1995: 52) must be protected from themselves if they want to enjoy peace and prosperity. This is only possible if the State is strong and led by a determined and cunning ruler. To maintain his rule (or hers: Machiavelli praised many female leaders for their fierce determination, see Clarke, 2005, on this point) and preserve the State, a prince "should not deviate from what is good, if that is possible, but he should know how to do evil, if that is necessary" (Machiavelli, 1995: 56), acting as a lion to frighten off the wolves and as a fox to recognize the traps.

Shocking as he has ever been, Machiavelli was a thinker of his time: Like the Renaissance artists around him, he found inspiration in the pagan,

pre-Christian world. He thought that the price Italy paid for Christian truth had been too high because it brought about the downfall of the Roman Empire. This is because Christianity demoted "worldly honour [and] glorified humble and contemplative men, rather than men of action, [assigning] as man's highest good humility, abnegation, and contempt for mundane things" (Machiavelli, 2003: 277–278). In contrast, Rome's, Athens', and Sparta's religions promoted "magnanimity, bodily strength, and everything else that conduces men to be very bold. And, if our religion demands that in you there be strength, what it asks for is strength to suffer rather that strength to do bold things" (2003: 278). God is not going to help: In place of the Christian ethics, the heroic values must be revived, for worldly power is a means as much as it is an end. *Vae victis*.

Even though he was writing for the benefit of heads of state, Machiavelli's lessons have been often transposed onto the management of private or institutional interests (e.g., Galie & Bopst, 2006; Julius, Baldridge, & Pfeffer, 1999). To secure their position and strengthen their organization or department, or so the Machiavellian advice runs, managers must surround themselves with a loyal team, protect the friendship of those who can help, but remove anyone who stands in their way. Executives are to choose their battles carefully but, once committed, must fight to win, no matter the moral costs. True protection of one's employees is not a display of Christian empathy but the rigid demand of organizational performance; a manager who tolerates a poor performer is failing everyone else. If management is "getting things done through people" and if power is the ability to bring events to pass, then management cannot be differentiated from the exercise of power. As Pfeffer (2010: 85) wrote in words Machiavelli would have endorsed, "acquiring real clout—the kind that helps you get stuff done—requires bare-knuckle strategies." The end justifies the means, since the two cannot be dissociated.

In the *Iliad*, Homer's heroes demonstrate courage, resilience, and determination. They hold themselves and their peers to exacting standards. They respect seniority, but excellence remains their ultimate value. When they do not rise to the expectations invested in them, they do not blame anyone but themselves. They do not complain or engage in self-pity but proudly confront their difficulties, for the greater the difficulty, the greater the glory. When they go down, they do so defiantly, standing their ground. They often express intense emotions but strive to dominate them and feel humiliated when they do

not; maintaining a noble stance in all circumstances is paramount to them. Friedrich Nietzsche (1998: 153–156) wished he had been able to say the same things of 19th century Western man. He praised Machiavelli's diagnosis of Renaissance Italy but took his arguments further. For Nietzsche, the moral predicament was much more serious than the Florentine had diagnosed. He saw no alternative to Western decadence from within the Christian ethics, which he deemed to be of slavish origins, suitable only for the weak willed. He analyzed Christianity as antinature, because it imposes the same values on everyone, ignoring that there are lambs and that there are eagles. Lambs will never fly, and holding it against eagles who act as birds of prey is absurd; preventing them from soaring above the herd is self-defeating, because it castrates humankind of its most glorious individuals. Nietzsche (1989: 29) thought that the "Greek nobility," the master-type individuals, strong willed and powerful, must be allowed to grow and dominate, for they are the only ones able to take Western culture to new heights. Nietzsche's "heroic individualism" (Thiele, 1990: 9) is extreme; yet it resonates today in contributions that argue that leadership is contingent on innate or acquired personality traits and that the leader is the "great man" able to take his organization to unchartered heights (see Hoffman, Woehr, Maldagen-Youngjohn, & Lyons, 2010; for a review and critique of this perspective; see also Khurana, 2002).

Rationalism

In Ionia (present day coastal Anatolia), by the 6th century BC, men started to inquire into the makeup of the world. Thales' answer (he proposed that the world was really water since almost everything contains or can take a liquid form) no doubt appears naïve to modern eyes, but it signals a momentous shift in thinking, never reneged upon since: There is more to the world that meets the eye. Reason leads to an understanding of what there is, as opposed to what appears to be. Coming after these Ionian pioneers, engaged in disinterested cosmological speculations, the Sophists inquired into more practical and immediate concerns. They notably preoccupied themselves with the art of living, which included the necessity of making money. Management educators before the time of management education, the Sophists instructed the young Greek elite and groomed it for prominent roles. No man in a Greek city-state could hope to attain a position of influence if he

was not capable of speaking in public—speaking well that is—and the Sophists were recognized expert rhetoricians. For a fee, they were ready to help anyone argue his position, regardless of the facts of the matter or the fairness of the cause, a practice at the origin of the ill reputation that is still attached to them. An enduring legacy of the Sophists is that they redirected thinkers' attention from inquiries into the ultimate nature of the world to ones that revolve around man and how he should live his life. In this capacity, they set the stage for the entrance of Western philosophy's perhaps most famous figures, Socrates and his devoted disciple, Plato.

Socrates and Plato dismissed heroism's acceptance of established traditions wholesale: Why should one obey the laws? What is justice? Goodness? Beauty? How should an ideal society be organized? In a move that would become rationalism's trademark, Plato (1970: 291ff) considered that only reason, not sense-perception, can lead to knowledge and answers to these questions. The good man is no longer the mighty warrior, but the wise man, he who through dialogue, logic, and argumentation arrives at Truth. Plato believed in the existence of two worlds, the world of everyday experience and another, for him, the real world. He thought that beyond appearances lies essence, that particulars (objects, properties, or moral values) can be recognized for what they are because they are imperfect representations of their respective perfect, unchanging and timeless universals, the "Forms," the understanding of which is accessible by way of the exercise of reason. In Books II to V of *The Republic*, Plato held that the ideal society is one that is ruled by those who care only for the common good, who seek truth, justice, and knowledge of the Forms but not material affluence, because the pursuit of riches is a source of corruption: Rulers must be philosophers and philosophers must be rulers (1970: 252). Detailed legislation about the conduct of society is not required because legislation is ineffective if people are not spontaneously disinclined to engage in wrong behavior. To that effect, basic moral education will be provided to all, but those in charge of the city are to be educated in rhetoric, literature, logic, mathematics, and history. These rulers will be seconded by brave, loyal, if intellectually limited, auxiliaries (Homer's heroes), who will execute their rulers' orders and protect the city from internal or external threats. As for the rest of society, the artisans, farmers, tradespeople, and merchants, they had better remain quiet and busy themselves with

their own affairs. Plato's texts are clear: The rulers are fitted to rule because they are the most qualified for the task. Like fathers caring for their families and good doctors for their patients, they have their say, by natural right and owing to expertise, on each and every aspect of their children's and patients' lives.

Plato (1970: 189ff) supported his three-layer model of society by a corresponding theory of man. He believed indeed that there was more to man than his body and held that the difference between a living and a dead man was the psyche, an immortal and immaterial substance trapped in the body. The psyche (or mind), Plato argued, although unitary, is composed of three elements: Reason, Spirit, and Appetite. *Reason* is the rational part, the ability to think logically, to proceed through careful argumentation and calculation toward the truth; *Spirit* is that part of the psyche that enables men to act out of a sense of duty and honor; the *Appetitive* part is where man's instincts are located, that which is directly connected with the body and its desires. The three elements of the psyche are in constant tension with one another, and men fall into three different classes depending on whichever part of their psyche is dominant. The rulers-philosophers are those in whom Reason is the strongest; they seek truth and their main virtue is wisdom. Their auxiliaries seek honor, behave according to their Spirit, and their important virtue is courage. As for the people whose function it is to provide the community with goods and services, they are dominated by their Appetites and seek gain. As long as they remain moderate in their demands, all is good for them. Such a society, Plato held, provides a social position that is consistent with each citizen's psychological abilities; it achieves individual happiness through social harmony and vice-versa.

With these recommendations, Plato is at the inception of a considerable number of ideas that reverberate in management thought. To start with the more mundane, he was the first to suggest that myths, values, and statuses, rather that detailed rules, are effective yet noncoercive ways to regulate behavior. This is tantamount to saying that culture is a controlling mechanism experienced as freedom, an insight that the management literature has not ignored (e.g., O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). Plato invented organization theory by proposing and justifying a multitiered model of society. Moreover, in his view, one's position is not to be attributed on the basis of merit, but on the basis of psychological structuring and dynamics acquired or reinforced during upbringing. In other words, Plato was the

first to argue that selection and promotion should be based upon what is often today called *personality*. Further, those who will make decisions on behalf of the group are to receive a different upbringing from that required for those who will execute their orders. For Plato, education was paramount to rulership; in 387 BC Athens he founded what can be considered the first ever Western management school, The Academy, as a place to lecture and study mathematical, historical, and political questions and where his philosopher-kings would complete their formal schooling. In its broadest outline, The Academy's curriculum has survived to this day, since management schools still propose a combination of quantitative and qualitative subjects. Aristotle, whose works would redirect thinkers' attention from supernatural entities to worldlier matters, studied at The Academy and hoped to take over Plato's chair. In the event, a forgotten rival was preferred. Not that this memorable appointment blunder prevented the institution from enjoying an enviable legacy: Plato's heroes, the academics, have accepted his challenge and made theirs the claim that, if they are not to rule themselves, at least they are to educate those who will (a move that also ensured the highly politicized nature of education).

"Plato is at the inception of a considerable number of ideas that reverberate in management thought."

In the wake of the political disintegration that followed the fall of the Roman Empire, rationalism took a back seat for centuries. Many great philosophers flourished in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, but the conditions that resulted in the civilization-shaping intellectual vitality of 4th century Athens were not reproduced until Florence and the Italian Renaissance. In any case, the exceptional filiation that runs from Socrates to Plato to Aristotle, like an alignment of celestial bodies that happens only once every thousands of years, has not been observed since. By the end of the 16th century, it was up to a French philosopher, René Descartes, to provide the rationalist flame a renewed source of energy.

Descartes (1987) was among the first thinkers to confront the tensions that had by his lifetime developed between religion and the beginnings of science. The study of man's body was progressing fast, and the circulatory and respiratory systems had been discovered. Like that of the planets, the movements of which were progressively chartered with greater accuracy, it seemed that the day would soon come when man's behavior would be explained and predicted by way of causal laws, making freedom an unnecessary concept. Christianity, however, demanded freedom to establish personal responsibility and justify its ethics. Besides, an omnipotent God is not constrained by His own promises, be they implicit; even though He has made the world behave in constant ways so far, He can decide to change them tomorrow. Objects fall when they are released and may have done so from the beginning of time; this cannot be a promise of God that they will do so tomorrow, because God cannot have His powers curtailed even by Himself. If this is the case though, then science, which seeks to discover regularities in the workings of nature, is pointless.

A devout Christian and a considerable mathematician, Descartes took on the task of finding answers to these problems and reconciling his faith with his scientific commitment. Since no man of religion and no man of science could claim to know the truth in their respective fields without being exposed to rebuke, Descartes decided he could not take any of their teachings for certain. He soon realized that he could doubt everything, even that he had a body or that $2 + 3$ really made 5, but that he could not doubt that he was doubting. Since doubting is a form of thinking, and since he could not think without being something, Descartes (1987: 78) concluded that thinking is a proof of existence. In the small corner of his self-consciousness, no one, not even God or an evil genius could deceive him in reaching this conclusion. Man is a "thing that thinks": The senses are fallible and often mislead; the mind, however, when it presents to itself clear and distinct ideas cannot be mistaken. It is upon these innate, self-evidently true propositions that human knowledge is to be rebuilt deductively, as per rationalism's foundational credo.

Descartes further held that the "thinking thing," the "I," mind or soul, is free because it is immaterial and unextended, free to think and free to choose; Christianity's ethics are safe. Conversely, the body is material and extended. It is not free; machine-like, it belongs to nature and does not escape its laws. Besides, God has no reason to lead man to believe that the world behaves in this or that way, only to change these ways later on a whim. Doing this would be tantamount to deception, but one engages in deception only when one has interests to protect. God, however, is everything and does not recognize

interests that are not His: He cannot be a deceiver since He has no agenda to further. Science can safely proceed and study nature as God is watching indifferently. Science, however, has nothing to say on the workings of the soul; this is the realm of faith and theology, which in turn must remain silent about the physical domain.

Descartes' *tour de force* is to have proposed a system within which science and religion, causality and freedom, determinism and ethics could be reconciled by being juxtaposed. Although controversial for its implied demotion of God (reduced to the role of a mere spectator) and elevation of man (who is now God's equal in the small corner of his self-consciousness), Cartesianism served as a launch pad for the scientific revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries because it rejected any appeal to authority while delineating neatly the respective domains of scientists and theologians. In this function, it has survived to this day and justifies that Descartes is often called the father of modern philosophy. Not that Cartesianism does not have its flaws; the most obvious one is perhaps that it cannot explain how a concept like the mind or soul, immaterial by definition, can interact with a material one (the body) and vice-versa. This problem (and many that derive from or are related to it) represents a logical impasse that cannot be overcome in the terms in which it has been framed.

Beyond its merits and demerits, Cartesianism has many consequences for managers. Descartes was a persuasive promoter of deductive analysis, which, when combined with synthesis, forms what he called (1987: 41) the "method of rightly conducting reason and seeking the truth." Left to itself, the mind is infallible and almighty as long as it operates according to the method that Descartes outlined and which demands that complex problems and tasks are decomposed into smaller ones until the point where these can be ordered and handled with confidence. Descartes is, therefore, the forefather of those numerous authors who argue that managers must proceed deductively and analyze the problem they must solve, the project they must complete, or the market in which they find themselves before committing to a course of action, itself composed of a succession of elementary tasks. Further, by insisting that the mind can detach itself from all physical sensations and operate independently of information coming from the body, Descartes simplified Plato's model and defined man as an essentially rational being, able to make decisions reaching beyond the requirements of its immediate situation: *Homo economicus* is Descartes' brainchild. Where Descartes' system met less success is in its implication that

psychology, if the expression is taken to mean "science of the psyche," is a contradiction in terms. Since the psyche (mind) is an immaterial, ethereal substance and not a material object (it is the subject), it escapes the reach of science. Its assessment is impossible except by God: Only He can read men's souls and decide of their fate in heaven. Anyone who pretends to chart the psyche as Descartes understood it (i.e., as uncaused cause of behavior) commits the sin of vanity of the grandest possible magnitude.

"Homo economicus is Descartes' brainchild."

The role of the mind in Descartes' scheme is not to be discounted though, for at the root of his method is the conviction that elementary ideas, when sufficiently clear and distinct, are necessarily true and must be recognized as such. The prime example of such self-evident truths is of course Descartes' foundational pronouncement that he exists because he thinks. Worthy of note is that the truth of this famous proposition cannot be derived through syllogistic reasoning, because Descartes has not established its implicit major premise, that is, he has not demonstrated that everything that thinks, exists (Descartes could not rely on logic anyway, since he resolved to doubt of everything that was not immediately recognizable as true). In line with its commitment to deductivism, Descartes thus founded his epoch-marking philosophy on an insight taken as axiom. This conviction (itself axiomatic) that deduction from axioms is *the* way to reason runs through all rationalist authors after Descartes. For all his careful dissection of markets and industries, Michael Porter (1998) did not defend the structure of his successful "Five-Forces" model beyond his assertion that competition in markets or industries is so structured and must be so analyzed ("The five competitive forces […] reflect the fact that competition in an industry goes well beyond the established players" is the closest to an argument I could identify; 1998: 6). That is, Porter's model has been deducted from an intuition taken to be self-evident—not surprisingly for an author trained as an economist, that is, committed from the outset to Descartes' model of man. Porter walked again in Descartes' footsteps when he proposed his "value chain" model, since this equally popular framework requires, in true Cartesian fashion, that one analyses in elementary stages the successions of activities that take place within organizations.

If Descartes is right, though, then managers must ultimately deduct their decisions on insights received as axiomatic truths. Success in management as in life more generally springs from the mysterious inner world of executives. The study of successful practices as enacted by organizations can serve as a useful guide, but only in the same way that artists study the work of other artists. Despite Descartes' insistence to the contrary, the validity of an insight can only be found in its practical application.

For these reasons, social scientists have turned to Karl Popper (1989) to deflate rationalism's claims by subjecting them to empirical critique. If knowledge ultimately comes from inner insights, then these must be amenable, at least in principle, to experimental confrontation, that is, to empirical falsification. In the negative, science will inevitably fall victim to the mystical excesses that are always ready to flow from self-revealed truths: "science must begin with myths, and with the criticism of myths" (Popper, 1989: 50). One learns something new about the world when one's current belief is contradicted by a new observation; if one believes that all swans are white, seeing yet another one does not yield new knowledge. Critical rationalism's (Popper's philosophy of science) most important statement is that scientificity is refutability: Theories that are not in principle refutable, that is, that cannot be put to the test of empirical refutation at least in theory (or so to speak), must be dismissed because they are mere tautologies. Unrecognized, a tautological theory is attractive because of its apparent great explanatory power. Too great a power in fact: A theory that cannot be falsified explains everything but also the opposite; that is, by explaining every possible outcome it predicts none in particular. Such theories can have the language, appearances, and academic reputation normally attached to science, yet they remain propositions best qualified as religious, non- or pseudoscientific (Popper, 1989: 38–39). When they take the form of management theories or business strategies, unfalsifiable propositions are of no use to managers. This is precisely the controversial charge that Powell (2001, 2002, 2003), as well as Priem and Butler (2001a, 2001b), have leveled against competitive advantage theory and the resource-based view of the firm, respectively.

Positivism

Descartes' scheme did not go down uncontested, even by thinkers unconcerned by his treatment of God. On the other side of the Channel, John Locke

(1988) pointed out that no idea could be innate, because ideas cannot be contemplated and manipulated by the mind without logical concepts and the means to process them, all of which men do not have until they acquire them. At birth, the mind is a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate: "Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas: How comes it to be furnished? [...] Whence has it all the *materials* of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from experience. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself" (Locke, 1988: 121, *emphases in original*). This statement is the birth certificate of modern empiricism. It led philosophers like David Hume (1985) to write about man as a wholly natural being, inscribed in nature and having to make sense of it exclusively through experience. Dismissing the concept of self-evident truths as a noxious illusion, empiricists held that truth cannot be obtained from within, but believed that knowledge is to be read in the great book of nature, from without. Rather than being deductive, philosophy and science must be exercises in empirical fact collection and the proposition of inductive inferences therefrom.

On the face of it, empiricism is science's best ally because it rejects as a matter of principle the position that men can know more about the world than that which can be experienced. Little wonder, then, that in their majority thinkers and scientists of the Enlightenment saw in this philosophy their best weapon against the emprise of religion. It was a vision that would eventually be recognized as too good to be true: As Hume was the first to realize if knowledge is to be arrived at strictly from experience, scientists face immense difficulties. Scientific theories are generalizations, universals inducted from particulars; they project the past into the future and move beyond the facts available. Hume (1985: 189) therefore concluded, "even after the observation of the frequent or constant conjunction of objects, we have no reason to draw any inference concerning any object beyond those of which we have had experience." Deduction is logical, induction is not deduction, and therefore, induction is not logical: The laws that the Enlightenment's scientists sought to discover and codify cannot be logically proven. Science, insofar as it aims to establish general truths about the world arrived at exclusively from experience, must fail. Scientific statements, especially those involving causal relationships, must be true a priori if they are to be formally true. That is, they must be disconnected from experience and be established on reason alone: An empirical science cannot be justified on its own terms, but must be taken on faith.

Descartes could rely on a non-deceiver God to make the world behave tomorrow as it has behaved to date, but this argument is not available to a philosopher committed to accepting only evidence from the senses. The natural science that the Enlightenment's thinkers enthusiastically pursued cannot be differentiated, on Hume's own arguments, from religion, that is, from "sophistry and illusion" (Hume, 1988: 509): Science is another religion the god of which is called causation. Fact-based, "hard-nosed executives" have been urged to care about management theory (Christensen & Raynor, 2003). They would be wise to remember, however, that in a strict empiricist outline no number of academic studies will ever formally prove a theory: All swans were white until one day they turned out to be also black. Similarly, evidence-based management has been offered as remedy to poor management practices and decisions (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006); perhaps, but only as long as one remembers that recommendations that are purely inducted from facts (observations, past sales, and market research) are little more than informed guesses.

"An empirical science cannot be justified on its own terms, but must be taken on faith."

Perhaps this is not such a bad conclusion, after all: Acknowledging that the future is unknowable admits the possibility of changing it. Auguste Comte (2000a, 2000b) wanted to achieve the latter but did not accept the former. To rescue empiricism from its Pyrrhic victory over rationalism, he proposed the expression "positive philosophy," soon shortened to "positivism" under which Comte's philosophy of science is known today. For Comte, science is a sociological phenomenon the evolution of which mirrors that of society. Science and society advance along three stages of evolution: theological (in which all phenomena are explained by calling on supernatural entities such as gods or God); metaphysical (explanations made in terms of natural, if as yet unknown, powers); and last, "positive." In this last era, the "why" questions that tormented the theological and metaphysical thinkers are dismissed and replaced by "how" inquiries. Answers to these must be proposed following four normative principles that clarify what terms such as "knowledge," "science," "questions," and "answers" mean: Phenomenalism (men should only be concerned by what they can observe); nominalism (terms

that do not point to tangible concepts must be ignored); respect of the fact–value distinction (reality must be studied free of moral prejudices); and a commitment to an inductive method applicable to all sciences, according to which hypothesized regularities are confronted by way of experimentation of new observations to arrive at the formulation of universal laws. These laws may be approximate, but this is no argument for considering them uncertain: Once they have successfully passed the prediction test, science's laws encompass the totality of what can be known about the phenomena they capture (Kolakowski, 1969: 1–10).

In other words, for Comte, scientists must not speculate about unobservable powers but must content themselves with codifying the way nature operates. The world is not the visible manifestation of another, deeper, or more authentic substratum: These manifestations are all that there is. It contains no mystery or magic, but only phenomenalistic laws that can be studied. Hume's skeptical arguments can be confidently set aside for belonging to the metaphysical period of evolution which sought to explain events by calling on unobservable (thus nondemonstrable) causes; the advancement of human knowledge leads inevitably to the positive stage in which knowledge is complete and all answers provided. Worthy of note is that positivism is unconceivable without determinism, not because it assumes that there are some hidden causes (it explicitly denies their existence), but because it starts from the view that all phenomena are ruled by universal and invariable natural laws. Positive knowledge is like a Russian doll set, with sciences organized along "the order which of all possible arrangements is the only one that accords with the natural manifestation of all phenomena: mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, physiology, social physics" (Comte, 2000a: 55). Comte acknowledged that not all sciences progress at the same rate, though; "social physics," or sociology to reuse the term that he invented, as the most complex, will also be last to reach its positive stage. Nevertheless, since society is the primordial reality and since all sciences are social facts, sociology is the queen of sciences. It alone can and will eventually provide meaning to all other sciences and locate them in the greater epistemological scheme. As for the "I," so important to Descartes, Comte (2000b: 100–101) dismissed it as the secular remnant of the soul, inherited from the theological stage of human knowledge; it could safely be ignored because its existence cannot be established by scientific means.

Beyond its normative principles that result in a particular definition of epistemology, positivism as a whole rests on the belief that the world can (and must) be studied through phenomena and that observations of these phenomena are, or can be made to be, objective (value-free). Put differently, positivism looks at the world as a collection of objects that can be reduced to their external qualities, with the further assumption that these are measurable without any preconception. Now the ability to measure requires a measuring framework. Before being able to count apples, I must know what an apple is. That is, measuring assumes some sort of general theory about what is measured. This theory must be available before the facts can be collected, adding a layer of preconception to what is being observed—an addition that positivism explicitly forbids. Positivism as a whole does not seem to be invulnerable to this charge, because whether positivism is itself a positivist position, or again, whether it is a conceptual framework arrived at from facts without any moral prejudice is debatable. Arguments like these led Popper (1989: 39–41) to reject the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle and develop his own philosophy of science, briefly mentioned above, according to which science must start with theories and not observations (this is not to say that critical rationalism provides science with a fail-safe epistemological basis; see Stove, 1991: 1–26 for criticisms).

Popper's comments would not be formulated before the 1930s, however. In the meantime and although not everyone subscribed to all aspects of Comte's thought or to his grandiose vision, positivism's influence on 19th century thought was profound (if not always acknowledged), because it provided historical, moral, and epistemological legitimacy to the scientific enterprise. Through the victorious march of science it vindicated, positivism promised—and for many seemed to deliver—in this world what Christianity had long promised in the other: healthier and longer life, material comfort, and reduced physical travails. Positivism's authority is still noticeable today across the scientific spectrum, especially in physics where the hope of unifying all theories within a unique model remains the official objective. In management studies, as in the social sciences in general, the demand for value-neutral and fact-based research is taken for granted, even though, for reasons broached above, it is not clear if this demand is itself value-free. When applied to management, positivism's agenda makes attractive promises, implying that management research is an endeavor aimed at discovering "laws of management" according to which organizations

operate and thanks to which their behavior can be predicted, enabling profits. Herbert A. Simon (1997/1947: 55) acknowledged positivism's sway on his enormously influential *Administrative Behavior*, in which he attempted to lay the foundations of an administrative science. More recently, following a transparent positivist line, Rousseau and McCarthy (2007) argued that management must be evidence-based, that is, must start from facts, proceed inductively, rely on the successful practices uncovered by management academics, and incorporate the best available scientific findings to date.

Descartes proposed a system of thought in which religion and science could coexist side by side in their respective spheres of authority. Comte placed science in general and sociology in particular above religion and above any sort of discipline (such as psychology) that wants to regulate or inquire into man's inner world. The price to pay for such a move is the annihilation of the vault in which Descartes safeguarded psychological freedom, the "I." If society really is the primary reality that can be known objectively, then social phenomena and entities, such as work organizations, their culture, and their members, develop and behave according to universal and immutable patterns, the laws that positivist social scientists seek to discover and codify but the existence of which they take for granted. In agreement with positivism's underlying determinism and denial of the primacy of the individual, notions like freedom, choice, morality, and responsibility must be recognized as misguided legacies of the theological era of human development that sociologists, managers, and employees must leave behind them. Like that of particles moved by mechanic or electromagnetic forces, the behavior of individuals is controllable through suitable incentives and appropriate structures. This "push-pull" or "billiard ball" perspective pervades human resources management and organizational behavior, notably in a recent textbook which affirms that employees are to be motivated and defines motivation, in transparent positivist language, as "the set of forces that causes people to engage in one behavior rather than some alternative behavior" (Griffin & Moorhead, 2012: 90).

Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation (the hierarchy of needs) must be the psychological theory most widely taught in management schools; it is also a great illustration of the above line of thinking. As per Maslow's theory, when managers are deprived of an office with a view, their self-esteem needs cause them to look for a new one in the same way Newton's law of gravitation makes their mobile phone fall when

it is let go. Similarly, when an executive is offered a promotion, he must accept it owing to his self-actualisation need, the same way sunflowers cannot but turn toward the sun. Now if employees are motivated by their managers, one can legitimately wonder who or what motivated these managers to motivate their subordinates, or, for that matter, what motivated Maslow and the authors of the textbook just quoted to write their works in the first place. God (as first cause) or the pitfall of infinite regress awaits all deterministic psychological models and those who promote them.

In any case, scientific psychology has been faithful to Comte's program because it has hollowed out what it set to understand, the "I," if this entity is understood as the free, uncaused but causal source of behavior. Beyond his little consideration for psychology, Comte would have received psychoanalysis with some degree of sympathy. Freud (2005: 15–17, 61–69) was adamant that his methods were scientific, that his model of the psyche was a naturalistic one, and that psychoanalysis will eventually claim its rightful place along, if not above, medicine and many other disciplines such as sociology, history, philology, and childhood education. Freud's fundamental assumption is that whatever a person does is caused by events taking place in this person's psyche, the tripartite structure (if not the balance) of which is part of the person's immutable human nature. He further believed that early childhood, especially its sexually connoted experiences, molds the internal dynamics of the mind, shapes psychic life, and eventually determines adult behavior. Even though the theory allows that patients, with therapeutic help, can bring up to consciousness material that was previously buried in the depth of their unconscious to recover partial control over their conscious lives, psychoanalysis is a deterministic model of human existence. In typical positivist fashion, it opens very attractive perspectives to marketers, managers, consultants, and those who study organizations. Once they understand the workings of consumers' or employees' psyches through the tools that the theory provides, they can make better informed marketing or staffing decisions or uncover the unconscious processes laying behind the expectations of markets and the problems of organizations (these are rich themes in the management literature; for a review of psychoanalysis' influence on organizational studies, see Arnaud, 2012; for a psychoanalytic study of marketing and advertising practices, see Oswald, 2010).

Romanticism

Oblivious to Hume's devastating conclusions and prefiguring Comte's positive philosophy, the philosophers of the Enlightenment shared a few important but generally unexpressed beliefs, distant legacies of Plato and Aristotle. Although opposed on many subjects, they all agreed in considering that the world is a given and that reason and experience (as opposed to faith) will eventually lead to a complete and coherent understanding of the world. Knowledge comes from the light of nature, and all questions can be answered, because there are methods available by which they can be provided. Moreover, all answers will prove to be compatible with one another, as nature is structured, stable, and predictable. Art is to represent and glorify nature; morality is to promote respect, equality, and dignity, upon which rest peace and harmony. What Newtonian science achieved for the world of objects, philosophy is to replicate for the world of men and their affairs, including ethics and aesthetics. Plato's Truth is within reach; philosophy, helped by science, is about to rule. Enlightened humanity is on the verge of unprecedented social progress: Once a perfect knowledge of men's goals and of their inner workings is established, a just and prosperous society will automatically follow, agreeable to all men since arrived at through a universal, science-like approach. Universality, objectivity, fidelity, symmetry, standards, discipline, and rationality were the main themes of the Enlightenment's confident program (Berlin, 1999: 119–120).

Not everyone subscribed to this optimism, however. The German romantics, as they are called today, saw will, not reason, as determining man's ends. For them, the world is without order, purpose, or meaning: These have to come from man, and logic has nothing to say about this creative process. Over rationality and objectivity, which they saw as cold, petty, and only concerned with calculating man's means, romantic authors elevated freedom, passion, imagination, and subjectivity, all notions which are central to life but remain beyond science's reach. Mankind has to escape from science to freedom: For romantics, science has failed to deliver since science cannot explain freedom yet freedom is a fact. Understanding is smothering, analysis, murder. Nature is inexhaustible; it will not, it cannot, be tamed, let alone coerced and contained in formulae. To think that life, in its chaotic and infinite variety, can be adequately encapsulated through exact mathematical signs is preposterous hubris. Science prides itself on studying what there

allegedly is; what there is, is not only indescribable, but also studying it estranges one from what there is not yet, from what there could be. The laws that science seeks to discover and codify do not follow from facts, because no number of observations can prove them, as Hume taught. Rather, events follow from scientific laws if these are true. What there is to know, what can be known, how the book of nature can be read as a model for man's life and society, the Enlightenment philosophers' obsessions, were no longer the relevant questions. What mattered to the romantics was what man can *will*. This was an ethical, artistic, and existential quest in addition to being an epistemological one.

Pushing this line further, Johann Fichte (1931) held that man's conception of the world had no empirical basis and that this absence of empirical contingency was precisely what freedom means. Descartes and Locke were mistaken: "I" is neither a given nor a blank slate imprinted by experience but is the result of man's actions, the product of will encountering resistance. Rather than trying merely to understand it, nature is to be given meaning and structure. Submission to the causal treadmill of the alleged "laws of physics" is suicidal stupidity, attractive only to the weak-willed incapable of inventing a life for themselves. Nature provides the shapeless raw material; men invent rules and objects. Life cannot depend on contemplative knowledge because there is no such a thing as disinterested observation of nature: "I do not hunger because food is before me, but a thing becomes food for me because I hunger; so I do not act as I do because a certain end is to be attained, but the end becomes mine because I am bound to act in the particular manner by which it may be attained. [...] The end does not determine the commandment; but, on the contrary, the primitive purport of the commandment determines the end" (Fichte, 1931: 112).

The romantic hero is the creator, the artist, not the scientist. Man is to reaffirm his humanity by inventing and asserting his own ideals by way of resolute action. Since the world has no intrinsic order, the notion of "rational happiness" is oxymoronic, pusillanimous, and contemptible. Whereas "enlightened" philosophers saw culture as a deterrent to violence, for Fichte, violence was the price for the existence of cultures. Universal values do not exist: Between peace and harmony by way of subjection to an alleged natural order and the possibility of chaos and war out of freedom, Fichte resolutely chose the latter. For similar reasons, romantic authors thought that it was a mistake of the

first order to believe that there were absolute, unbreakable, and scientific laws of economics and of commerce beyond human control. Concepts of economic law or force, such as that of supply and demand or the idea of an invisible yet benevolent hand of the market, were in their view pathetic absurdities. Those advocating such concepts only seek to protect their enviable social status, justify poverty and exploitation, and transfer the responsibility of their actions upon some sort of divine lawmaker. Economic institutions and regulations, money, and trade have to be the servants of man; they are to promote life, arts, and spiritual development, not stifle them. Economics is not a given, and it cannot be mankind's ultimate horizon either; it must be molded to man's ends (Berlin, 1999: 124–127).

In the management literature, the above ideas find their most visible expression in the works of Tom Peters. In books and articles published in the wake of the successful *In Search of Excellence* (coauthored with Robert Waterman, 1982) and in an increasingly volatile prose, Peters has been advocating a line that, despite the generous size of the volumes in which it is exposed, is easily summarized. For Peters, excellence is a crusade: an ideal ever-changing, never to be achieved, yet to be passionately and relentlessly pursued. Adamant that formulae will not do in a time of perpetual change, Peters (1991: 20–21) enjoins managers to "get beyond rational analysis," break the rules, and ignore strategic planning. Rather than sterile thinking, managers must have "a bias for action" (Peters & Waterman, 1982: 119ff): They must experiment, seek out, and try out new ideas, copy successful ones, observe, meet employees, listen to suppliers and customers, shout, tell stories, encourage, praise, scold, celebrate, talk the walk and walk the talk. Managers must live management because, it is only in living it that they will understand their organization and its environment. They must manage "by walking around" (Peters & Waterman, 1982: 122). Peters is unrepentant: Only in acting, even at the price of failing, that companies learn; in fact, firms should actively seek out failures, for the bigger the failure, the bigger the learning. Faithful to Schumpeter's "creative destruction" motto, Peters (1990, 1991) reminds his readers: "Get innovative or get dead." To "thrive on chaos," organizations must reinvent themselves constantly, eliminate middle-managers, devolve power to the lowest possible level, and involve everyone in everything because "there are no limits to the ability to contribute on the part of the [...] committed person" (Peters, 1987: 284).

Indeed, in characteristically romantic fashion, Peters (1991: 14, *my emphasis*) holds that "the asset value of our firms is no longer in smokestacks, but the skills and *will* that reside in the collective heads and hearts of employees."

A romantic philosopher of sorts, Nietzsche opposed Darwinism for reasons that have nothing to do with creationism. If Darwin were to be correct, Nietzsche (1968: 47, 364–365, 2003: 86–87) argued, if evolution really meant "survival of the fittest," that is, "of the most adapted to the environment," then biological diversity is impossible to explain. Convergence can only obtain if the unique and unescapable criterion of survival and reproduction is environmental fitness. Nietzsche also held that Darwinist evolutionism pictures species as inexorably forced to perfect states of adaptation. Darwinism is deterministic and externally driven: Species survive, evolve, and reproduce neither randomly nor as they wish, but as they must, that is, as the environment dictates. This principle was for Nietzsche an insult to life and especially to *homo sapiens*. In his view, that species have survived changing conditions and multiplied to the extent that they have can only be accounted for by an internal resistance to the environment helped by an abundance of resources. In a Darwinian outlook, the more adapted, the more fragile to a change in the environment. An evolutionist himself, Nietzsche concluded that evolution cannot be driven from without, but from within; it is not the most adapted that survive and multiply, but the most adaptable. In Nietzsche's terms, the more adaptable species, such as the human one, are those which exhibit stronger will to power.

If Nietzsche is correct on these accounts, then, as Peters insists page after page, organizations should be wary of being too adapted to the market or industry in which they compete (a regular theme of Peters' from his first work onwards; see, i.e., Peters & Waterman, 1982: 106ff, or Peters, 1991: 19). At best, adaptation only buys time; at worst, it spells extinction when market conditions change. Rather than aiming for perfect adaptation, firms should value flexibility, to be able to react to evolving conditions. That is, they should be wary of tight and rigid business processes; rather than efficiency, they should strive for effectiveness. Success leads to failure because it transforms bold and novel attempts into sacrosanct business habits that destroy adaptability (Peters, 1991: 18; see also Tushman & O'Reilly, 1997). The most efficient processes, such as the moving assembly chain, are the most inflexible

and make firms fragile (a line that operations management authors have argued for some time; see, i.e., Lee, 2002: 114). Job descriptions are to be burnt outright, for employees must look at the bigger picture and "think in 'wholes'" (Peters, 1990: 25). No one is better suited to do this than "renegades," "crazies" that firms should employ, who disregard "fat rule books," irritate many but contribute and evangelize (Peters & Waterman, 1982: xxiii). Managers must not hire employees based on the degree to which they "fit" the organizational culture, because the more they do so, the more difficult it will be for this culture to change when, not if, it will have to. They would better hire as great a diversity of profiles as is possible; doing this will help their organization resist "groupthink" and will ensure that it values contribution above conformity. Within limits, disagreement is source of contribution (Peters, 1991: 10–11).

For all these reasons, Peters' works, irrespective of what one thinks of them, develop an extended critique of management as an empirical or rational activity and extol the power of the uncontrollable individual. To generate value for customers and shareholders, Peters' managers must in their own ways be artists: They must mobilize energies above contingencies to impose resolutely their vision onto their organization, employees, markets, and so forth, like sculptors carve blocks of marble, like maestros lift orchestras above musicians' individual scores and achieve musical ecstasy. Peters' first book titles and subtitles tell this story better than a long analysis: *A Passion for Excellence* (with Nancy Austin, 1990), *Thriving on Chaos: A Handbook for a Management Revolution* (1987), *Liberation Management: Necessary Disorganization for the Nanosecond Nineties* (1992), or again *The Pursuit of WOW!: Every Person's Guide to Topsy-Turvy Times* (1994). Knowingly or not, willingly or not, Peters is a romantic management author, in form and content.

Existentialism

Despite the romantics' warnings, positivism triumphed by the late 19th century. Its inherent determinism as exemplified in psychoanalysis led thinkers to look for alternatives, however. One of these is existentialism, a rich if loosely defined philosophy, the distinctive ascientific and almost poetic flame of which has burnt in the works of writers united in their opposition to systematic models of man and society. Each in their own ways and sometimes in opposition to one another, existentialists wrote to remind their readers of the

supreme importance of choice, responsibility, freedom, and authenticity without which they believed man's life is nonsensical. Over and again, they point to experiences such as faith, empathy, love, aesthetic consciousness, or artistic inspiration to insist that, whatever man is, he cannot be adequately represented by a mechanical model, no matter how sophisticated. For these thinkers, if existence really is determined, then human beings have been in catastrophic error about themselves for millennia. Concepts like intentions, efforts, morality, or justice have to be discarded. Purposive behavior is merely instinct; action must be reinterpreted as reaction; rationality must be reanalyzed as irrationality, and responsibility is in fact irresponsibility. In a determinist outlook, man is a string puppet, a non-person, in the sense that he is no longer the embodiment of a self-determined "I" but merely the focal point of internal and external, past and present forces, which result, with the help of uncontrollable biological processes, in the movements of the limbs. For existentialists, accepting this picture of man is failing humanity; they see determinism as a degrading position that strips mankind of its obligations toward itself. Perhaps more important, to the extent that personal responsibility is inscribed in the core of the Christian credo and since Christianity is a pillar of the Western ethos, determinism is a subtle attack on Western civilization's foundations.

Among these authors, Sartre (1966, 2007) held that freedom is the primary datum of human existence. The essence of man, his consciousness, is nothingness, for if it was a thing (an object) it could be acted upon and would not be free. Yet free it is because it must be: Without freedom there is no choice, no action, and no intention, all notions without which life cannot even be conceived. Man behaves not because he is caused to react, but because he has reasons to act (Sartre, 1966: 530–533). Man is never devoid of choice: At every moment, he makes decisions, the ultimate one being to continue with living. When one believes that one does not have a choice, Sartre's demand is that one elevates one's level of consciousness until the point where one recognizes that this is an illusion, that one does have a choice, even if it entails ending one's life; at minimum one can choose how to die. The one choice man does not have is that of choosing: "[M]an is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (Sartre, 2007: 29). To believe that one's choices are constrained or that one's

responsibility is limited was for Sartre a self-inflicted debilitating enterprise stemming from a cowardly wish to be socially sanctioned and encapsulated in the desires of others. Man has to face his nothingness and his absolute freedom alone; he must reinvent himself everyday through his actions. External supports and agencies are illusory and demeaning, because they imply that man finds value in something else than himself.

Not that one should feel free to do whatever one chooses: Sartre (1966: 273ff) insisted that one recognize in others the essence, that is, the nothingness, that there is in oneself. One is to treat the other not as an object but as an "I," for one's freedom rests on the freedom of the others. Not only must I resist objectification in the gaze of the others, but also, for the others, my own gaze must not be an objectifying cage. At the same time though, my freedom and responsibility expand much further than my person, for what I do exemplifies my values and sets an example in the eyes of the others: "I am [...] responsible for myself and for everyone else, and I am fashioning a certain image of man as I choose him to be. In choosing myself, I choose man" (Sartre, 2007: 24–25). Every action, then, is a commitment, in one's name as well as in that of mankind. This responsible freedom is demanding and source of anguish, but it is also liberating, because it opens unlimited horizons. Existentialism is tough minded but optimistic: The past cannot be undone and the present is what it is—the future, however, is what man makes of it.

This very fertile line of ideas could be expanded much further (as well as criticized), but not here. For its central emphasis on commitment and responsibility (terms that were virtually nonexistent in the philosophical glossary until then), existentialism was bound to stir the interest of management writers. Attempts to bring existentialism to bear on management thought date back at least to 1960 (Rice, 1960; Odiorne, 1966), and some have gone as far as crediting existentialism for having a deep influence on public administration research and practices (Waugh, 1998). For others, organizational theory has still to absorb and make sense of existentialism's lessons (Macmillan & Mills, 2002). In any case, existentialism led management writers to engage in and promote soul searching. Calling for a "revolution from the top," Richter (1970: 415) reminded executives of public administrations of their freedom to choose. "The management term for choice," wrote Richter (1970: 417), "is decision-making." Administrators must stop hiding behind

established systems and procedures, shed their bureaucratic indifference, and accept the responsibilities of their decisions.

Spillane and Martin (2005: 93) agree, applauding existentialists for reemphasizing, in their own ways, the gulf between formal descriptions of relationships (such as job descriptions) and the reality of relating. Whereas traditional management literature favors scientific, objective views of people (as human resources), an existentialistic one stresses the importance of autonomy, empathy, and subjectivity in human relationships without which large structures can only become impersonal bureaucracies. In their view, employees always retain a degree of self-control and have to accept the responsibility of their actions, insofar as they could predict their consequences. Managers' attempts at maximizing their freedom while minimizing their responsibility are childish and self-defeating. As adults, they should welcome the anxiety that inalienable responsible freedom generates as the proving ground of their maturity. Spillane and Martin (2005: 19) note, however, that employees who express their autonomy in the workplace will not be accepted by those who want to control them. In an organization, whoever asserts his inalienable freedom is an obstacle to management and is likely to be treated as such. If employees yield to management, it can only be for pragmatic reasons, because they see their personal interests in obeying rather than in disobeying, in other words, because the tangible cost that would follow from dissent is perceived as exceeding the moral price attached to submission. In this outline, authority granted to management is revealed as an idiosyncratic illusion, "a confidence trick" with which employees fight the anguish stemming from their responsible freedom (Spillane & Martin, 2005: 94). This authority cannot be justified beyond the fact that, without it, managers and employees would not be able to act at all.

Spillane and Martin (2005: 87–89) further observe that Chester Barnard made very similar points when he developed his theory of authority in his landmark and still influential *The Functions of the Executive*, first published in 1938. Barnard (1968: 168–169) indeed observed that employees assent to management authority only within their "zone of indifference," that is, that one accepts orders when these refer to the tasks one implicitly accepted when one became an employee. In his view, the range of this zone of indifference depends "upon the degree to which the inducements exceed the burdens and sacrifices which determine the individual's adhesion to the organization" (1968: 169). Authority, then, comes from below: It rests with those to whom it applies. It is a subjective notion that is dissolved by dissent. In words that could have been Sartre's, Barnard (1968: 170) called the belief that authority comes from above "the fiction of superior authority." Little surprise then if he closed his study on an existentialist-sounding "declaration of faith" in which he asserted his belief "in the cooperation of men of free will [...] accept[ing] their responsibility for choice" (1968: 296). It is very reasonable to infer that Barnard had been exposed to some form of existentialist thinking when he prepared the lectures that would become his famous book. If this is the case, existentialism's influence on the canons of management thought deserves to be explored further.

Postmodernism

The first romantics were moderate in their demands and merely sought to reaffirm human freedom and dignity in the face of the determinism implied by Newtonian physics. They accepted the existence of scientific laws but did not want man to become their servant and aspired to preserve a place for myths and magic in an increasingly industrial and urban world. Less retrained authors, such as Fichte, refused to yield to the authority of anything, even of plain facts; they were happy to sacrifice peace in the name of idealized personal freedom and power. In the event, romanticism did not survive the 19th century for long; after the destructions of World War I, the ideals of the former and the exaltation of the latter made way for more tangible and immediate concerns. For all that, romanticism, for better or worse, definitively dispelled the idea that in ethics, aesthetics, and politics, truth is achievable, that there are objective criteria according to which one can decide which view is superior. Whereas before romanticism debates were about goals, the means to reach them and their consequences, all of which were deemed to be objectively measurable, since romanticism the discussions have been limited to motives, with the implicit understanding that consensus will be impossible. In other words, the Enlightenment project as it (perhaps naively) culminated in positivism had already been dealt a fatal blow in the hands of the romantics before being slaughtered in the trenches of North-Eastern France. It was to be supplanted by modernism, itself soon superseded by postmodernism.

After Plato, religious and atheist philosophers alike accepted that knowledge was virtue. For these thinkers and regardless of their great and many

differences, Truth was the unique, ahistorical, extra-human, immutable, and ultimate, that is, God-like, value-objective in the pursuit of which men should and could come together. If the romantics are right though, if absolute truth is no longer achievable, or if it is not unique, then Western thinking has been a misguided effort from its Platonic start. In the postromantic world, as Nietzsche saw, truth and its loyal servant, reason, are demoted to the status of tools among others. The price to pay for this demotion is no less than apocalyptic, for if reason is not an infallible guide, then approaching ethics, aesthetics, and politics rationally has been a laughable enterprise, doomed from the outset (on this general theme as well as Nietzsche's diagnostic, see MacIntyre, 2007: 51–61, 109–120). In the wake of the death of the Absolute (God for Christians, Truth for atheists), certainties of all kinds are revealed as illusory, arrogant, and oppressive. Uncertainty rules, sects multiply: A moral crisis of epic proportion looms. It was then only a matter of time that, after ethics, aesthetics, and politics, next in line to fall was epistemology.

From about 1970 onwards, authors argued indeed that the notion of a natural and absolute empirical bedrock foundation, taken for granted by the Enlightenment thinkers and their positivist successors, was an illusion; the most one can do is upturn masks and decipher metaphors, knowing that behind each one there would be yet another. The Enlightenment's project is itself uncovered as an elaborate enterprise in deception which, under the cover of universalism, relied on science and philosophy's rhetoric to secure the elites' power over those it was meant to emancipate. Not only is knowledge power, but also, as Michel Foucault (1972) insisted, power itself is knowledge, because it produces only the knowledge that affirms it and decides who can produce knowledge. Is true whatever achieves power. Man has become an artificial creature, a product of the technosphere's discourse, itself a servant of the controlling classes' desire for perpetuation. Explanation must give way to interpretation and objectivity to perspectivism; analysis is replaced by deconstruction and metaphysics by metanarrative. Western philosophy, rather than being the expression of an encompassing and disinterested quest, is in fact "old dead white men's philosophy" (Inglis & Steinfeld, 2000). The individual itself evaporates; there remain collective and individual narratives playing out uncontrollably and that are to be endlessly genealogically interpreted and reinterpreted, since no interpretation is final. Definitive meaning disappears, buried under layers of interpretation; rationality fades into irrelevant discourse. Science is only a narrative among many, "conspicuous, noisy and impudent" (Feyerabend, 1976: 295). Language is a game whose words lose and acquire signification depending on context, itself nothing else than text and interpretation of text. This series of substitutions and abandonments is postmodernism's antifoundational foundational diagnosis, prescription, and research agenda (see Shalin, 1993, for a critical review). Over these ruins, it is not surprising if moral relativism has prevailed, traditional values collapsed, and nihilism settled, as Nietzsche (1968: 7ff) predicted it would. The absence of culture is still culture; junk is now art and noise, music. "Hyperreality" (Jean Baudrillard's (1994) coinage for the representation of reality in the mediasphere) and its simulacra have taken over. The disappearance of meaning compounds the overall moral and intellectual confusion; Western thinking lies on its deathbed (Sloterdijk, 1987: xxvi). In any case, pride has given way to shame; whereas, for centuries, the West thought its mission was to conquer and enlighten the world, now it seeks repentance for its colonial past. The empire truly has collapsed.

Postmodernism's dissolution of absolutes accords well with business in a multicultural world, the dematerialization of the economy, the virtualization of the office, perpetual change, and the advent of the Information Age. As societies fragment under the pressure of cultural relativism, mass production of goods is supplemented by customization of services. Corporations used to serve populations whose aspirations they sought to understand; they now target individuals whose desires they make concerted efforts to shape and whose sense of agency they try to reduce to a shopping craving. Consumerism triumphs: While Cartesian man considered thinking as proof of his existence, postmodern man cannot conceive of himself outside of compulsive consumption and instant gratification. National flags lose their force in the face of commercial logos, dinner table sermons concede defeat to marketing discourses, and the authority once deriving from the Ten Commandments now flows from ubiquitous global brands. In the hyperspace, firms compete through elaborate narratives because for many, virtual reality is more real than reality. To the delight of marketers, words are malleable and their significance can be stretched to extraordinary lengths: Advertising campaigns seriously pretend that brands have a personality, machines are sexy, and scented aerosols make families happy.

"In the hyperspace, firms compete through elaborate narratives because for many, virtual reality is more real than reality."

Modernity substituted farm labor for factory labor; postmodernism has substituted the factory for the "office where symbols (words, numbers, computer icons) are analyzed and manipulated" (Fox & Miller, 1998: 432). In the postmodern workplace, unity of command and centralization of information have been replaced by decentralization and networked communications, while Weberian hierarchies have become fluid adhocracies. In the absence of fixed foundations, perpetual organizational change is the norm. Organizations are the new families of their disoriented employees; organizational ways, even if ever so transient, are elevated to culture status. Management is now leadership; indeed, constant change is not so much to be managed than it is to be led through an 8-step process (Kotter, 1995) that amounts to little else but careful story telling. Privacy has become notional as communications are spied upon by corporations and government agencies, individuals' whereabouts are monitored by video surveillance, and shopping or Internet browsing habits are extrapolated into psychological profiles. For critical management scholars (many of them inspired by postmodernism's themes), the objectivity demanded by positivist research is a mirage, for reality (especially social reality) is always constructed, never passively recorded. So-called organizational science is thus for them synonymous for managerialization (for overviews of postmodernism's multifarious influences on critical management studies, see Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2007 or Fournier & Grey, 2000). In this context, George Orwell's dystopia does not seem so far off. The moral crisis has translated itself into a financial, social, cultural, political, and environmental one. For the West, the end of the line does seem to be in sight; at any rate, as postmodernists insist, human existence is now text to be interpreted, symbols to be deciphered, and data to be mined.

Other Philosophies

There would be considerably more to say, especially with regard to epistemology. Important themes like idealism, empiricism (beyond the few comments offered on Locke and Hume), dialectical materialism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and poststructuralism have been omitted. Rich and fascinating as they are and although debated for some in the management literature, these philosophies do not propose major additions, in the context of a discussion that seeks to identify the major philosophical roots of dominant management concepts, to those reviewed. Idealism is intimately connected with rationalism and so is empiricism with positivism; united as they are in their common dismissal of timeless absolutes, hermeneutics and poststructuralism, despite their many divergences, can be subsumed, with caveats that cannot be offered here, under the postmodernist movement (Shalin, 1993). Similarly, phenomenology does not need to be differentiated from existentialism for its focus on intentionality (Sartre was a phenomenologist before developing his existentialism) and from empiricism, owing to its insistence on unmediated first-person experience, on the other. As for dialectical materialism (Marxism), allowance made for its historical and social importance, its marginal influence on what is taught in management schools today does not warrant its inclusion in this argument. The same goes for neo-Marxism, the presence of which is undetectable beyond the borders of critical management studies. These observations do not hold for the works of Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, and George Edward Moore. These philosophies, the ethical dimensions of which are routinely taught in business ethics classes, have already received considerable attention in the management literature; including them here is of little interest. For similar reasons, the discussion offered stayed clear of the moral implications of the themes selected.

Management being a pragmatic activity that cannot be detached from the necessity of achieving tangible results, one may be surprised not to find above a section dedicated to pragmatism. Pragmatism is an almost exclusively North American philosophical movement that started in the late 19th century, met with considerable success in the first half of the 20th century, declined almost to extinction from about 1950 onward before enjoying a multifaceted if indirect revival since the mid-1970s. In the words of one of its founders, pragmatism was a "new name for some old ways of thinking" (subtitle of James, 1975/1907), namely empiricism, of which it was said to be a radical form; James' goal was indeed to arrive at unassailable knowledge by grounding it upon its practical consequences at the expense of any other conception. This led James to reject foundationalism, that is, to dismiss any

attempt to establish truth on a priori postulates. Pragmatism connects here with postmodernism: As mentioned, postmodern philosophers, beyond their many disagreements, are united in their disdain for timeless principles. If, as they argue, knowledge is not an unchangeable given but is constructed on the objective of legitimizing power and social domination, then the truth of a proposition is not to be found in a man-independent substratum but, as James taught, in its practical outcomes. This perhaps unexpected congruence between early and late 20th-century thinking explains pragmatism's return in philosophical grace (Kloppenberg, 1996). For these reasons and again in the context of the present discussion, pragmatism's classic formulation does not need be differentiated from the few comments on empiricism offered earlier; as for pragmatism's revival, it can be seen as belonging to the broader postmodernist movement.

MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

The far-reaching implications of the foregoing cannot be exhausted here, but some first comments can be offered. Superficial as it had to be, the account offered above is enough to show that management academics, even those who do not teach business ethics, have long based their arguments on mainstream philosophical traditions. The idea that different kinds of people require different kinds of education is of Platonic origin, and so is the assumption that management is a body of universal concepts that can be taught. When one advocates a framework inspired by Drucker's management by objectives, when one is adamant that managers are paid to achieve results, when one believes that the future of an organization rests on the shoulders of its CEO, or that effectiveness in action is all that really matters, one promotes ideas that found their first expressions in the heroic poems. When one teaches economics or game theory, one relies on a picture of man as rational animal articulated by Descartes, and when one argues that project management is first an exercise in task decomposition, one has accepted the universal validity of his method. When one believes that managers are to deduce their actions from insights taken to be self-evident, one inscribes oneself in the rationalist tradition. Conversely, when one holds that managers must base their decisions on value-free evidence and that organizations and their employees behave according to law-like patterns, one has accepted the axiomatic assumptions of positivism. When one believes that organizations can only survive and grow by being innovative and that innovation has nothing to do with rationality or experience, one argues a distinctively romantic line. When one insists that managers remain always free and responsible for their decisions, one borrows from existentialism's main theme. Last, when one holds that management has become manipulative surveillance, that business schools encourage managerialism and disseminate a self-legitimizing and oppressive language, that all is at bottom a power game, that (male) conspiracies are constantly working and that organizations are not to be managed on the basis of inexistent facts but led by way of narratives, symbols, or other cultural artifacts, then one has been influenced by postmodernism. Genuine innovations in management literature are extremely rare, just as they have been in Western thought. What management authors do, knowingly or not, is to isolate one thread and present it as forming either the dominating or most interesting pattern of the entire fabric. Like those of a tapestry though, intellectual threads are not meaningful by themselves; they acquire their interest and import when seen in the context of the overall drapery.

Uncovering the philosophical foundations of management thought will go a long way toward clarifying contradictions that have plagued management academia for decades, because tensions which have developed within Western philosophy have found their way in what is taught in management school today. One cannot consistently view employees as sources of new (i.e. unpredictable) ideas and as human resources whose behavior can be predicted by way of deterministic psychological theories; one cannot hold that employees are psychologically controllable, yet hold them to be morally responsible beings; one cannot teach business ethics and the view that management is or should be a science in the same breath. Similarly, one cannot conceive of consumers as rational agents, as economics or game theory assume, while at the same time being driven by an overall pleasure principle, as parts of marketing and consumer behavior theories maintain. Indeed, one cannot simultaneously advocate freedom and determinism, at least not without considerable philosophical sophistication that the management literature does not come close to offering. Similarly, one cannot advocate scrupulous study of organizations and their environments as the sole source of strategy and simultaneously hope that new ideas will spring from such endeavors, for one cannot be an empiricist and a rationalist at the same time: Either ideas come from without, or from within. Either one learns from experience, or one plans (because one

knows) first, then acts second (cf. the Mintzberg–Ansoff controversy alluded to in Mintzberg, 1996). Or again, one proceeds either inductively from particulars or deductively from universals. The long-running debate about the relevance of management research (which pretends to universality) to managers (interested in particular results) is fruitfully approached in these terms (Aram & Salipante, 2003). Further, if one is passionate about what one does, then one will not accept being constrained by traditions, material contingencies, or even apparent logical difficulties. Passion and rationality are not compatible; Peters must be granted consistency at least on this point. Besides, if organizations are irrational entities (as versions of institutional theory allege), teaching management students cold analytical skills is unlikely to help them (or their employers). Last, if one believes that all the above dichotomies are misguided because language is deception and grammar God in plain clothes, that there is no such a thing as truth (or if there is, that it is unobtainable), then one is committed to a version or another of postmodernism.

After Comte, natural sciences have emerged as enterprises seeking to formalize natural laws; after Gadamer (2003: xxi–xxiii), human sciences are often characterized as exercises in understanding. Now if one believes that management is an invention and not a discovery, then management belongs to the sphere of the human sciences and what is taught in management schools finds its roots in long-standing philosophical arguments. If this is the case, studying management concepts demands reaching back to the conceptual substrata that saw them grow. Simplified as it is, the overview of Western thinking offered earlier can be read as an illustration of this view. Conversely, if one believes that, although management concepts are themselves man-made, they point to phenomena which predate man's understanding of them, then one is bound to believe that there are universal and value-free methods available to managers through which they can improve their practice. Science as positivism defines it is understandably the first candidate in the quest for a model through which these management phenomena can be discovered, codified into laws, taught, and eventually implemented; little wonder if Frederick Taylor called his methods "scientific." As Ghoshal (2005: 77) noted, this positivist, scientific perspective has emerged as the arch-dominating one within management academia over the last decades. Its price has been exacting, however, for, as Ghoshal lamented in the same contribution (and as many critics have held against Taylorism), it has meant that subjectivity, intentionality,

freedom, and responsibility (the existentialists would say: "humanity") had to be taken out of whatever "equation" or law-like generalization was taught to management students. Worthy of note is that positivism is itself a philosophical tradition, built on philosophical arguments as an attempt to overcome philosophical problems. In other words, even if one believes that management is or should be a positivist science because organizations are governed by invariable laws, one must still accept the claim made above, albeit at a degree once removed: Understanding management concepts requires understanding the philosophical foundations that made their formulation possible in the first place.

The very concept of management education is predicated on the assumption that there exists a body of knowledge without which the practice of management is defective. Since technical knowledge does not age well and tends to be industry-specific, this body of knowledge must be of a sort that endures through time and is generic enough that managers require it in as many of their activities as is possible. Now if management is "getting things done through people," then managers do not do anything by themselves (they have others doing it for them) except communicating in all its forms, orally and in writing. As the Sophists saw in their own ways, management is first and foremost a linguistic practice and rhetoric the most important skill of managers. Besides, if one accepts that thinking is talking to oneself (as Socrates explains to Theaetetus in Plato's eponymous dialogue), then reasoning is illusory if one's internal dialogue is muddled by terminological confusions. One cannot make meaningful decisions, study insightfully organizations, or ponder over one's place in the world if one does not understand the tenets and consequences of the words one uses to frame the problems one is trying to solve: Be it in management research, education, or practice, genuine understanding consists in recognizing one's biases lurking underneath one's apparent detached objectivity. To communicate meaningfully and effectively with their peers, students, or subordinates or to talk to themselves when engaging in decision making and reflective practice, managers and those who study management have little option but to be sensitive to language. Philosophy is the discipline of choice to develop this skill, because paying attention to the meaning of the words one uses is the first demand, and thus the first learning outcome of philosophy.

To train is to instruct through drills and rehearsals designed to inculcate procedures, routines, and standards that deliver tangible and predictable results. In line with the view that managers are paid to

deliver on measurable objectives, management schools have long presented themselves as places where management training was taking place. In a Platonic world such as the Western one, however, no amount of training will by itself legitimize community or business leadership; training must be supplemented by education, that is, by an understanding of the reasons and concepts which make training valuable in the first place. Plato demanded that rulers be philosophers because he saw that even if philosophy teaches conceptual understanding at the expense of practical knowledge, practical knowledge is of no value without conceptual understanding. Knowledge without understanding is only a particular without a universal, a means without an end, or again a solution without a problem. In other words, when management schools pride themselves on delivering purely instrumental education, they forget that this education makes little sense outside of the philosophical foundations that not only justify this education, but also make its articulation possible.

More generally, what is really important about any philosophical perspective is not what it explains, but what it assumes and permits. Identifying the philosophical foundations of management thought is an exciting research program for philosophers and management academics alike. For the former, it represents the opportunity to showcase the tangible manifestations of a discipline often derided for its practical irrelevance; for the latter, it promises to ground within a broad (which is not to say united) framework a body of knowledge often indicted for its internal dissentions. Exposing the philosophical foundations of management concepts also reveals how vulnerable, at least debatable, these concepts are. No definitive standard for deciding which philosophy is superior has emerged to date. In that sense, a course in philosophy is always a course in critical thinking: As the course unfolds, powerful and well-rehearsed counterarguments become available to refute any given philosophical position. Analyzing management concepts through the lens of philosophy thus emerges as a sobering enterprise, one able to poke holes in the "pretense of knowledge" that management academia has been charged for fueling (Ghoshal, 2005: 77). Incidentally, it will also deflate the "know-it-all" arrogance that many critics believe management schools foster in their students (e.g., Mintzberg, 2004: 36ff).

If all the above has any value, then the study and the practice of management is impossible in the absence of philosophical references, in the darkness of an imprecise language, or in the senseless profile of a world without intellectual perspective. Learning

management concepts or theories without insights into the worldviews upon which they rest and the consequences they lead to can only result in superficial, narrow, and short-lived learning. One only really knows a concept or theory when one understands where it starts and where it stops, that is, when one is able to argue against it. Only then one appreciates what one still has to learn: a crucial stance in a postmodern world without firm foundations, the outline of which is perpetually shifting. Courses in Western philosophy have, therefore, their place in management schools' core curricula: Not only is philosophy necessary for management students truly to make sense of what they are supposed to learn, but also it provides them with indispensable critical and lifelong learning skills. Without them, students, academics, and managers alike can only remain the slaves of their unrecognized prejudices and contradictions, of the orders they receive from above, or of the bottom line. They are bound to become the robotic executants of a framework reduced to a purely technical perspective running its course uncontrollably. Now perhaps more than ever, "convictions are prisons" (Nietzsche, 2003: 184). As for the impossibility of deciding which, among the worldviews that developed over the history of Western thought, is superior, it must not be received as a paralyzing dilemma. As the existentialists stressed, if one is to live, one is to act, and if one is to act, one is to choose: To paraphrase the saying attributed to Kurt Lewin, "there is nothing as practical as a good philosophy." Management, just as life in general, is philosophy in action. Management academia must come to terms with the meaning of this conclusion.

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Heroic Drucker

Jean-Etienne Joullié · Robert Spillane

Abstract The purpose of this article is to argue that the ethical concepts and principles that made Peter Drucker a leading figure in management can be analysed in the terms of the oldest Western worldview, ancient heroism. A description of the salient features of heroism is offered first, followed by an overview of Drucker's 'Management by Objectives' (MBO) framework. These expositions show that ancient heroism is an important component of MBO and reveal its strengths and weaknesses.

Keywords Drucker · Homer · Heroism · *Iliad* · MBO

The fame and influence of Peter Drucker have been such that he was once qualified as 'the one management theorist [whom] every reasonably well-educated person, however, contemptuous of business or infuriated by jargon, really ought to read' (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 1996, p. 63). How Drucker's works ought to be read is not an easy question to answer though, because they have received applause and criticism in equal proportions. While the clarity of his style and breadth of ideas have been often praised (see for instance Kantrow 2009), others have accused him of being an ideologue denying or systematically understating the negative consequences of management and capitalism (Gantman 2005, pp. 72–74). While commentators have highlighted the Christian and existentialist strands in his ideas (Starbuck 2009), others have

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indicted him for contributing to the debasing of workers by promoting the Taylorist and bureaucratic traditions under different names (Waring 1992). Little surprise then if Drucker's books have been regularly found to form an incomplete or unsolved puzzle (Lamond 2010; Kanter 1985). The present article argues that the solution to this 'puzzle', the key unlocking Drucker's best-known management books, *The Practice of Management* (1955) and *Management: Tasks, Practices, Responsibilities* (1974), is Western philosophy's oldest worldview, ancient heroism, as it transpires from Homer's *Iliad*. A critical analysis of this philosophy sheds a revealing light on Drucker's management thought and exposes its strengths and weaknesses. Drucker's management books were allegedly on Jack Welch's bedside table; if this is the case, Homer's *Iliad* should be on any manager's desk.

Homer's *Iliad*

The overall story of the *Iliad* can be simply summarised. The siege of Troy is in its tenth year; both sides are weary of fighting. A quarrel erupts among the Achaeans' leaders and Achilles withdraws from battle. Both sides accept to settle the war through a duel between Helen's former and current husbands, but its outcome is indecisive because of divine intervention. Fighting resumes; each time one side dominates, an extraordinary set of circumstances deprives it of final victory. As an Achaean army bolstered by Achilles's return push the Trojans back to their walls, Hector, Troy's champion, stays alone to face his Achaean counterpart. The Trojan hesitates, fights and meets his fate. The city mourns but still stands; an atmosphere of impending tragedy is palpable throughout the last pages.

Beyond the simplicity of its storyline, the *Iliad* reveals an overall simplicity of a higher order. Homer 'love[d] names which mean something' (Jaeger 1946, p. 40): his language is devoid of abstractions. He based his text on action words (verbs, adverbs), concrete nouns (characters, objects, locations) and adjectives. Reading the poem it is clear that, for its characters as well as its author, the world is limited to what they can observe or infer directly therefrom. There is no difference between what is and what appears to be. Even though the poet occasionally used words such as 'men', 'horses' or 'ships', these terms refer to people, animals of ships that could be, in principle, individually identified. A ship is a ship because it sailed to Troy even if it now rests on the beach.

Homer's Heroes

Although a war story, the *Iliad* does not glorify death. Rather, Homer glorified and idealised life (Jaeger 1946, pp. 17–20). Under his stylus, life is splendour, to be lived to the fullest. Alive the warriors burst with vitality: fire flash from their eyes and rage in their chests. When not pierced by spear or arrow, their hearts overflow with indomitable fury. The battlefield constantly resonates with roars compared to those of lions or wild boars, the victorious army sweeping forth like a river in flood. Emotions are always lived with the greatest intensity: night watchmen are subject to 'immortal panic' and 'cold terror'; when in grief, men are 'stricken with great sorrow'; they shake with anger, fear, or both. The entire story emphasises the wrath and pride of the warrior. Lust is never far away from love; warriors' moods swing violently between profound nostalgia for peace and utmost determination for battle. Spirits are either at their highest or at their lowest but never at rest. The protagonists are completely absorbed in the here and now.

To modern eyes, heroism is the ability to swim against the tide and to defy expectations to create new ones, with all the risks this entails to personal survival and social stability; ancient heroism consists in the exact opposite. In (ancient) heroic societies, individuals are defined by their roles, to which are attached expectations of performance, rules of behaviour and rewards when results are forthcoming. Intentions and feelings are irrelevant, only results matter. Might is right: heroism is a philosophy of power expressed through action. In this outline, social role defines the characters. In the *Iliad*, the protagonists know where they stand in society, what they owe to others and what others owe to them. Always proud, they are swift to retaliate when challenged. They deal with others not as they expect others to deal with them, but as their respective social ranks dictate. One does as one's social position

compels one to. Warriors are to be brave, strong, determined and resourceful in battle; they also value humour and cunning, but only as complements if courage is failing. Young men are supposed to be impulsive and bold, old men wise and prudent, women beautiful, faithful and loving (Jaeger 1946, p. 22).

Areté, or virtue, is the ideal of excellence Homer's main characters strive to attain and embody (Jaeger 1946, pp. 5–7). It is not an ideal from which they could distance themselves, however; more than duty, *areté* determines behaviour and defines the characters' existence. Heroic existence is defined by the recognition peers afford; those who fail in their responsibilities surrender their right to exist and are dealt with accordingly in the hands of their friends or enemies. In the *Iliad*, the hero is whoever true to the role his peers expect him to discharge, who accepts the demands placed upon him and displays the required virtues in heroic action. To an embattled friend, an Achaean leader enjoins: 'Man, supposing you and I, escaping this battle, would be able to live on forever, ageless, immortal, so neither would I myself go on fighting in the foremost nor would I urge you into the fighting where men win glory. But now, seeing that the spirits of death stand close about us in their thousands, no man can turn aside nor escape them, let us go on and win glory for ourselves, or yield it to others' (Homer 1961, pp. 266–267). Little doubt Leonidas of Sparta spoke in similar terms to his men as they prepared for their last stand at Thermopylae.

Homers' heroes are supposed to comply everywhere and always to the heroic code. They must never surrender to such emotions as fear, wrath or love, which lead them to ignore the rules that define their roles and justify their right to exist. They are often tempted to do this, though. The verses of the *Iliad* are as much awash with tears as they are with blood: many a moving scene shows a hero torn between his duties and his longing for the tranquillity of his home, the arms of his wife or simply a warm bath. Duties always win eventually, as they must, for without them, the hero ceases to exist. Running before Achilles, Hector has become a 'dog' (p. 444). When he comes back to his senses and tries to negotiate with the terrifying Achaean the promise that whoever wins their duel will honour the defeated opponent's body, he is angrily dismissed. The heroic code has been broken: Hector behaved cowardly, Achilles draws no satisfaction from his victory (Jaeger 1946, p. 47) and fails to gain his just rewards since no one can take pride in slaying a dog. The Trojan, by fleeing, surrendered his warrior status, thereby abandoning any claim he could have had over peers or enemies. One can trade only for so long on past successes; one must always remain ready to deliver here and now. Controlling his emotions is the ultimate proving ground of the hero. Hector's inglorious death is a miniature of the heroic code.

If Homeric man knows what he is to do, then he also knows how to evaluate his and his peers' actions (Jaeger 1946, p. 9). Descriptions of how one person is to act, has acted or failed to act, fall under the sphere of objective, factual statements. In Heroic societies, the virtuous is assessable with certainty: empirical methods are the basis for moral enquiries. Actual performances are either praised or blamed, but one cannot deflect one's peers' judgement by invoking one's intentions or by pointing to factors beyond one's control. If one's performance fails to meet the criteria of success embodied in one's role, one cannot avoid the charge of having come short of the expectations and social obligations encapsulated in it. Irrespective of the circumstances that have led to it, failure is a moral error as much as a factual one (MacIntyre 2008, p. 123). In this context, it is only natural that a strong sense of purpose animates the characters of the *Iliad*. For the Achaeans, Troy must fall and Helen be returned; for the Trojans, the besiegers must be pushed back to the sea. When this clarity of purpose weakens in the face of adversity, even the most formidable heroes call to the gods in despair. This desperation is understandable: without an overall goal, heroic life becomes unexplainable, absurd even, since it, the entire edifice of roles, rules and rewards collapses.

Homer's Man

For Homer, there is nothing beyond appearances; this applies equally to man, who finds his place entirely within observable nature (Jaeger 1946, p. 50 and note 34, p. 429). The characters of the *Iliad*, gods as well as men, do not develop psychologically. A one- or two-word outline is the most they receive; Odysseus is at times said to be 'crafty' or 'resourceful', Achilles and Hector 'brilliant' and many others 'valiant'. Sustained physical descriptions are similarly absent. Instead, the poet never tires of insisting on the defining features of his gods and heroes, what makes them great, through expressions that almost systematically precede their names. These phrases point invariably to an external, directly observable attribute: 'lovely-haired' Helen, 'swift feet' Achilles, 'powerful' Agamemnon, 'gigantic' Ajax, 'warlike' Menelaus, 'tall' Hector 'of the shining helmet', Hera the goddess 'of the white arms', 'grey-eyed' Pallas Athene, etc. Collectively, the Achaeans are 'long-haired' and 'bronze-armoured' while the Trojans are 'breakers of horses'.

More importantly, Homer had no word for the modern concepts of 'self', 'mind', 'soul', 'ego', 'character' or 'personality'. The various terms found in the original text and sometimes interpreted as proxies for them (notably *psyche*, *thymos*, *noos*), point to organs and physiological processes or refer to analogies with them. While *soma* means 'dead limbs' or 'corpse', *psyche* is what keeps the characters alive, the source of their power and the breath that the warriors exhale when they die; *thymos* is the seat of their emotions, and *noos* is their visual acuity. The notable absence of spiritual language is not mere Homeric rhetoric but highlights a deeply entrenched, if never explicitly stated, ontological perspective: ancient heroism's man is body and behaviour (Snell 1953, pp. 1–22). There is no recourse in the epic poem to an internal puppeteer who pulls or is constrained by invisible yet unbreakable strings of actions (usually referred to as psychological 'needs', 'drives' or 'traits'). This is consistent with the observation that Homer's characters do not, indeed cannot, strive for self-affirmation, but can only aim at social affirmation (on this theme, see Jaeger 1946, pp. xxiv, 9). Although heroes are different from one another, Homer never transformed them into a sort of Russian doll the inner core of which escapes control. There is no distinction in the text between doer and deed, between action and actor. Homeric man is what he does, to the extent that a man and his actions become undistinguishable concepts.

For similar reasons, Homer had no language for choice, intention and rationality. His heroes do face alternatives, consider various solutions to their problems and deliberate. They base these deliberations on practical necessity, however, not on the careful weighing of contradictory options. When they ascertain what is consistent with the heroic code, decision is automatic. Achilles, Hector and their peers are not fully responsible for what they do because their roles determine their behaviour. The absence of conceptual separation between the characters, their roles and their actions also makes the attribution of personal responsibility very difficult: one does not attribute responsibility to an act, but to a free-choosing actor. Having no language for self, Homer's protagonists cannot entertain a notion of self-consciousness, pre-condition for the establishment of personal responsibility.

When the characters of the *Iliad* dream or are overwhelmed by feelings such that they behave unpredictably (as they regularly do), they are said to be under divine influence (Jaeger 1946, pp. 51–53). Gods, or the dreams and feelings they induce, make characters break the heroic code, fail their duties and betray their peers. Although the constant intrusion of the gods irritates modern readers, Homer needed them to explain the otherwise unexplainable. Lacking a psychological vocabulary, he had to resort to 'external' entities to describe internal events. One must remember, however, that gods are man-like entities in the *Iliad*; 'almost palpably human' (Jaeger 1946, p. 53), they fight one another, conceive of and execute stratagems, fall in love, bleed, engender children, etc.). While immortal and more powerful than human beings, they can still see their plans dwarfed and defeated. Victory over the gods

remains within the reach of the determined heroic individual, leaving room for an anthropocentric and humanistic view of human existence (Jaeger 1946, note 35, p. 429). Resisting the inhabitants of Mount Olympus is the heroic equivalent of today's 'self-control'.

This body of concepts presupposes a clear hierarchy of statuses and functions. Understanding of that structure and obedience to those above in the social order of rank are two essential aspects of heroic morality. At the very bottom of the social structure are the slaves, superseded by the various non-warring members of the Achaean expedition or of the Trojan city, all of whom being barely granted attention in the Homeric poems. At the other extreme stand the warriors, commanded by their respective kings; transparent throughout the plot is the notion that promotion to the rank of king is only open to the great warriors (Jaeger 1946, pp. 5–7). Success on the battlefield is heroism's ultimate social value.

The Achaean kings regularly meet in council, led by Agamemnon. This group is anything but monolithic; stern rebukes and harsh words fly readily. When the Achaean leader, suspecting disaster, proposes to retreat under the cover of nightfall, Odysseus starkly opposes him: 'Son of Atreus, what sort of word escaped your teeth's barrier? Ruinous! I wish you directed some other unworthy army, and were not lord over us [...] Now I utterly despise your heart for the thing you have spoken.' At the end of this sharp tirade, Agamemnon can only concede: 'Odysseus, you have hit me somewhere deep in my feelings with this hard word. But I am not telling the sons of the Achaeans against their will to drag their benched ships down to the water. Now let someone speak who has better counsel than this was; young man or old; and what he says will be to my liking' (the exchange takes place in Homer 1961, pp. 296–297).

These internal tensions among Achaeans kings, paralleled by similar ones among Trojans leaders, are not incidental distractions superimposed on the fabric of the *Iliad* and its main plot. They recur regularly throughout the poem, and the main story is itself triggered by Achilles opposing Agamemnon's decision to keep a woman slave for him. Angered, Achilles withdraws and pleads the gods to bring the Achaeans to the brink of defeat to appear as their saviour. In this dispute, both Achilles and Agamemnon behave unpredictably and defy the heroic code (as Agamemnon admits, p. 86; for more details on this episode and its significance, see Jaeger 1946, pp. 10ff). Achilles goes much further than his king, however, since not only does he refuse to fight as he is meant to, but he also develops his own agenda, calling for his peers' downfall. In contrast, Odysseus, who also regularly opposes Agamemnon's opinions in unambiguous terms, remains careful that cohesion within the Achaeans is not stretched to breaking point. That Achilles is later instrumental to the Achaeans' victory does nothing to alleviate the ominous fact that he betrayed his side and, adding insult to injury, wished its demise. His death before the walls of Troy as the city is about to fall (events taking place after the *Iliad*), prophesised by a dying Hector, is the price he pays, indeed must pay, for his unheroic behaviour.

For all its overall simplicity and cohesiveness, heroism is not immune to criticism. It makes no room for individualism and very little for innovation since it demands that its members adhere rigidly to exacting conventions and standards. Its wholesale reliance on appearances reinforces this phenomenon: heroic man is unlikely to look for anything beyond what immediately appears to be. Science is unconceivable in the heroic world of Homer since nothing substantial happens in the *Iliad* without divine intervention. The price to pay for a culture of excellence according to exacting standards is the unquestioned perpetuation of traditions; because of this, heroic societies are inherently stable. To wit, heroism enjoyed an exceptional longevity: it was the dominating worldview from at least the time one of the earliest texts known, the Epic of Gilgamesh, was written (between 2800 and 2500 BC; Dalley 1989, p. 40) until the days of Homer (9th–7th centuries BC).

The emphasis on performance according to rigid standards that pervades the *Iliad* has additional consequences. Even though its characters are supposedly different from one another, the weaponry used in the *Iliad* is such that the survival of a warrior of weak constitution or short physique is a near impossibility. Homer's recurrent epithets through which his protagonists are distinguished ('shining helmet', 'white arms', 'grey eyes', etc.) confirm this observation; although central to the epic tradition, they all pertain to stereotyped, ornamental physical attributes irrelevant to the unfolding of the story (Jaeger 1946, p. 41). The emphasis on immediate performance also makes Homer's heroes oblivious to the idea that there could be value in merely trying or even in failing. History is replete with examples of failures that later turned out to be, or were re-interpreted as, great successes. The discovery of America is perhaps the most obvious example of such events.

Ancient Heroism Today

Karl Marx commented that Greek heroic poetry derives its allure to modern man because the world it describes stands to modernity as the child stands to the adult. In Marx's view, this charm was a dangerous one: when the adult tries to be the child he once was, he is only childish (Marx 1973, p. 111). Although there could be merits in this piece of Marxist psychology, one of its unstated premises is that modernity is a more mature expression of Western

humanity than ancient heroism. Such an evaluation begs the question; one fails to see why lead, powder and the typing press (items that Marx called in support of his assessment) are signs of civilizational maturity or even of cultural progress. In any case, the magnificence of the *Iliad* owes nothing to them.

The Homeric poems propose the refreshing simplicity of a language devoid of reifications and abstractions. There is no psychology to be found in the *Iliad* unless one analyses such a deficiency as a form of psychology according to which whatever happens 'within' a given individual is of no interest except perhaps for himself. Homer judged individuals by their actions, irrespective of motives that escape external scrutiny. Absent, naïve or primitive, Homer's psychology is in any case free of the circular reasoning, pervasive today, according to which people act greedily because they are greedy (the only evidence for the 'internal' greed is the observed greedy behaviour). It is axiomatic in logic that for a proposition of the form 'x causes y' to be valid, x and y must be separately identifiable. No one has ever observed a psychological need or personality trait: they are merely backward inferences from observed behaviour. In this respect, Homer is the forerunner of those anti-psychologists known as behaviourists who argue that all propositions about mental activities are translatable into propositions about behaviour.

Heroic life is simple in its outline, but it is not simplistic and does not yield easily to caricature. Homer's heroes demonstrate courage, resilience and determination. They cannot comprehend the acceptance of anything less than the highest possible standards. They focus on actions and invest in them all their energy. They confront their opinions and accept harsh rebuke, valuing contribution and achievement above all. They respect seniority of age but even more so excellence. They can be unruly yet know when to yield to discipline, accepting the full consequences of their acts when they do not. They do not blame anyone but themselves when they fail to perform to appropriate standards. They endure their existence with tears but without hesitation, taking pride from their difficulties. They never engage in self-pity. They express no regrets over past decisions but live resolutely with them. They remain unburdened with guilt but consider the possibility of shame with terror. When they go down, they do so nobly, standing their ground. They readily express intense emotions but strive to dominate them and feel humiliated when they fail to do so. One wishes one could say the same things of twenty-first century Western man; if only owing to this, ancient heroism is a lesson of life. Should there be a child–adult relationship between heroic and modern man, its direction cannot be as obvious as Marx took it to be.

The legacy of the *Iliad* is perceptible today, especially in settings that glorify honour and individuals who display courage when confronted with towering duties. One thinks of the military and of US General George Smith Patton (1885–1945) when looking for a modern domain and figure that exemplify the values of ancient heroism. In 1909, then a West Point cadet, Patton scribbled on the back of one of his textbooks: 'Qualities of a great general: (1) tactically aggressive (loves a fight); (2) strength of character; (3) steadiness of purpose; (4) acceptance of responsibility; (5) energy; and (6) good health and strength' (Von Hassel and Breslin 2010, p. 29). Patton remained all his life an uncompromising stickler for military discipline and traditions. He blended this intransigence with a deep and sincere empathy for the sick, the wounded and the dying. Well-known for his impulsivity and fierce speeches, he slapped across the face and scolded in the harshest terms two soldiers resting in a field hospital, claiming to suffer from 'battle fatigue'. For Patton, such behaviour was cowardly and represented an intolerable insult to those risking their lives in battle. Publicised by a self-righteous press, these trifle events (in the context of war) nearly destroyed the career of one of the most successful, if controversial, generals of the history of the US Army, perhaps even of recorded military history.

The sports arena is another domain where parallels with heroic life present themselves readily. Within a sports team, one is to hold one's place only as long as one performs as one's position and the conditions on the field dictate. Poor performance leads to exclusion; intentions are not accepted as substitutes. Difficult or desperate situations, rather than being sources of dishonour, are proving grounds for the best performers; unlikely recoveries create sports legends. As in a heroic setting, rules are not open for discussion; breaking them results in instant penalisation or dismissal.

Additional analogies are possible in other domains, with varying degrees of illustrative relevance. It is clear, however, that even in a military or a sports environment, no one can be a Hector or an Achilles today. Performance expectations within these circles cannot be compared with those that underpinned heroic societies; one might view with amusement the inflexible sense of duty that Homer's heroes embody. As for holding others accountable for their shortcomings to the exacting degree of the *Iliad*, it is a recipe for psychiatric intervention. For all that, one feels justified in wondering whether Homer proposed insights that could benefit managers and management students, notably his praise of roles, performance and standards, his glorification of action and self-control and his disregard for psychological language. These features and the limitations they lead to resonate in the works of a famous management writer.

Peter Drucker

In the field of management, one author stands out: Peter Drucker (1909–2005). In the decades that followed the Second World War, Drucker was the most widely read and celebrated management writer in the world. Born in Vienna, he studied economics and law in Austria and England before settling in the USA, teaching philosophy and politics at Bennington College in Vermont from 1942 to 1949. From 1950 to 1971, he was professor of management at New York University's Graduate School of Business. He then taught social science and management at what is now Claremont Graduate University in California, still lecturing in his nineties. During his long career, he published thirty-nine books and hundreds of articles and columns, delivered thousands of lectures, authored and appeared in educational films on management and found the time to consult to numerous organisations around the globe.

In his first book (*The End of Economic Man: the Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1939), Drucker sought to explain the rise of totalitarianism in Europe from a social perspective and derive from his analysis recommendations for social harmony. He diagnosed Marxism and fascism as the results of capitalist industrialism's failure to meet its social responsibilities in a context marked by the disintegration of traditional societies and values. Capitalism demanded that noneconomic activities be subjected to economic ones but, in Drucker's view, this hierarchy fed a nihilistic snake in capitalism's bosom. Totalitarianisms of the Marxist or fascist sort, he analysed, grew out of the irrational desperation of masses led by elites unable to provide ethical answers to the real and pressing questions of the modern industrial age. A new form of society was required, which would provide meaningful role and standing to its citizens through economic organisations reshaped as communities. Subsequent works, *The Future of Industrial Man* (1942), *The Concept of the Corporation* (1946) and *The New Society* (1949) pushed this line further. In them, Drucker insisted that individuals had inescapable needs for, thus inalienable rights to, autonomy, security, dignity, belonging and respect. Work was to provide status and function as much as revenue. When employers took labour as replaceable commodity or when workers simply considered their jobs as sources of income, in other words when either party saw the other as merely means to ends, frustration of the kind that led to totalitarianism was the unavoidable result. The conflicting agendas of the individual and of the economic organisation could only be reconciled through responsible acts of citizenship by employers and employees alike. Drucker believed that a new and developing profession occupied an essential role in bringing about this meaningful integration: management. The role of managers

was to make economic resources and workers productive in ways that had to be rewarding to all parties involved.

While developing these arguments Drucker had the opportunity to study firsthand the internal workings of what was then one of the most successful industrial corporations in the world, General Motors (GM). For 2 years from 1943 Drucker sat freely in meetings, talked to GM's senior managers (including legendary CEO Alfred Sloan) and analysed their political, social and structural relationships (Drucker 1980, pp. 256–293). He applauded the ways GM managers accepted and enforced responsibility for contribution, rewarded strong performance and reacted to poor performance. He learned from GM executives that management's job is to ensure that work is productive and workers achieving by making their strengths effective and their weaknesses irrelevant. These ideas, outlined in *The Concept of the Corporation*, were to receive their full development in *The Practice of Management* (1954). This work, written after a long professional and personal relationship with Harold Smiddy (acknowledged at the end of the preface as the book's 'godfather'), is for many the first and final word on management. In any case, it catapulted Drucker from relative obscurity to worldwide fame within management circles. The later and perhaps more widely read today *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (1974) is an expanded—diluted—version of *The Practice* (incorporating elements from *Managing for Results*, published in 1964) that does not deviate from its main theses.

Management by Objectives and Self-Control

In *The Practice of Management*, Drucker promoted the popular if widely misunderstood 'Management by Objectives and Self-Control' (MBO). At the root of this model lays the conviction that managers are to focus on what the job—as opposed to the boss—demands. Amicable communications and job satisfaction are not the drivers of good management but only its optional, dispensable, results. For Drucker, to ask of managers to be friends with their colleagues is to ask them to focus on appearances, to take their eyes off what really matters to their professional development and to the organisation's success and survival: contribution to the overall goal of the organisation. In his view, strong performers earn the right to be disagreeable to their boss, peers or subordinates, for such individuals are justified in directing them to their workmanship's deficiencies and in demanding of them that they improve. Managers should not assess behaviour in the workplace in terms of friendliness, but of effectiveness. Managers do not become leaders by prying into their subordinates' personalities in an attempt to predict their behaviour. Rather, leadership is a relationship between leaders and followers and is

irreducible to either party. Leadership is the ability of managers to persuade their subordinates that they deserve, on the grounds of workmanship, to lead, matched by the ability of subordinates to persuade their managers that they deserve, on the same grounds, to be followers (Drucker 1989, pp. 153–157). Furthermore, Drucker failed to see any relationship between job satisfaction and effective work performance. Rather, he believed that dissatisfied workers and managers are among the higher achieving ones, for job satisfaction could only be a soothing, a quieting of the drive to do better and raise standards. Dissatisfaction is merely another and unfortunate name for willingness to achieve (pp. 296–297).

Drucker argued that tackling independently matters like workmanship standards, practices, tasks and responsibilities only leads to incapacitating confusion. To bring everything meaningfully together, including workers and managers, a common language is required. This, Drucker held, is possible only through the definition and pursuit of unambiguous objectives. Objectives are the integrating cement of the organisation. Without them, not only planning is impossible, but also no organising, no setting of expectations, no performance measurement, no delegation, no employee development, no meaningful decision-making and no leadership can take place. To define objectives is to decide what the organisation is about, what it should be as compared to what it could be (Greenwood 1981, pp. 226–227). Objectives are not self-evident; they are the very heart of managing.

Once accomplished at the organisational level, the setting of objectives is to cascade to all levels of the hierarchy. Managers achieve commitment to these individual, team and departmental objectives through clear delineations of responsibilities. These did not apply only to workers but also to managers. Managers are to have a hand in the definition of their own unit's objectives, for the delivery of which they are stringently accountable. To be part of management means precisely to reduce the distance between personal objectives and workmanship standards and those of the entire organisation by making the consistency and continuity of the former with the latter apparent. Drucker was adamant that managers, even though they are by necessity administrators of the resources under their supervision, are not controllers of their subordinates' performance. Measurement is of course a required ingredient of effective management: the setting of objectives is nonsensical in the absence of regular measurements. For Drucker, however, control in the workplace means self-control.

All employees in the organisation are to be clear about what managers expect of them, why and how they are to deliver on these expectations—as well as what will happen if these are not met: perform or be fired. Enforcing this approach was for Drucker the only way to generate accountability at all levels. By a thorough understanding of the demands of their work and mastery of workmanship standards, workers and managers achieve self-control. Managers must provide transparent and complete feedback on individual performance; all employees are to be their own boss, free within the standards of their workmanship (1989, pp. 133–134). When these conditions are satisfied, managers can enforce discipline, continuous development and high performance. For Drucker, self-control is not a desirable option with which organisations can dispense. Self-control is simultaneously a basic demand of employee life as well as the most elementary condition of an organisation's survival.

This emphasis on unambiguous objectives and self-control means that managers can operate as internal entrepreneurs within decentralised yet orderly organisations. Since individual and organisational objectives are consistent, it is possible to devolve decision-making authority to the lowest level possible. Of particular importance to Drucker were the departments that participate in the overarching purpose of any business: creating a customer. Departments that contribute directly to this objective are those in which the result-producing activities take place (generally Sales, Marketing, Research and Development or Manufacturing and Treasury because it supplies money). Departments that provide the result-producing units with guidelines on how to operate are the support activities. All the remaining functions are housekeeping activities: although necessary, they contribute nothing directly to the results and performance of the organisation, and their malfunction can damage the business severely. Drucker asserted that contribution determined ranking. Managers should never subordinate result-producing activities to support activities, let alone to housekeeping units. Heads of the result-producing and support departments form the top management of a business organisation. Members of this group do not have to like each other and disagreement within the Board is nothing to be afraid of, as long as it appears cohesive to external observers. The top management group has to have a captain even if the group, rather than the captain alone, takes the most important decisions (1974, pp. 621–624).

Drucker believed that MBO includes all these dimensions and reconciles employees' as well as organisations' legitimate demands. Through it, organisations reach their objectives and employees achieve meaning in their work and dignity in their lives. This is neither democracy nor permissiveness: it is corporate citizenship. Importantly, however, this citizenship expands beyond the boundaries of organisations since these do not exist by and for themselves. If managers have to contribute to their organisation's objectives, organisations themselves have to

contribute to the harmony and stability of the society in which they operate. Drucker believed that public good determines private interests but its achievement rests on private virtue. The ultimate and public responsibility of managers is to make a public good of their own self-interest within the limits of their area of performance (1974, pp. 349–351). Not recognising this responsibility was, in Drucker's eyes, an unforgivable moral failure on the part of managers. Its consequences were nothing short of catastrophic, as the first part of the twentieth century painfully showed: 'tyranny is the only alternative to strong, performing autonomous institutions. [...] Performing, responsible management is the alternative to tyranny and our only protection against it' (1974, pp. ix–x).

Drucker's Legacy

Drucker's works have been widely criticised. He was initially not popular with management academics who found his prose superficial and journalistic. Some pundits have indicted him for being thin on original research and drawing from too many disciplines without mastering any in particular (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 1996, pp. 73–75). Others have accused him of distilling the obvious, but this is both missing and understating the point. While fleshing out MBO, Drucker coined the now pervasive expression 'knowledge worker' (2008, p. xxiii). He insisted on decentralisation and privatisation yet held that not-for-profit organisations had insights and practises to teach commercial ones. He argued that managers should measure organisational activities in terms of the value they generate in the eyes of the organisation's customers. He urged American managers to consider Japanese firms and their management methods as a source of inspiration. If these themes and countless others now sound too obvious to be worth mentioning, then it is largely because they were first passionately and persuasively espoused by Drucker. Critics are on more solid ground when they point out that Drucker's later books do not compare favourably with his early ones in terms of originality of content and rhetorical power, recycle old concepts and examples or immodestly refer to previous works. His enthusiasm for large, information-based organisations rings hollow in view of today's information overload scourge. Prolific author as he was, Drucker found it impossible to produce new, lasting insights year after year. He has not been alone in this predicament.

Drucker's work can be criticised on two distinct yet related grounds: his conception of people at work; and his vision of an ideal society. For him, people want to work and disintegrate morally and physically when they do not (1989, p. 266). He insisted that employees should be empowered to the maximum of their ability because they constantly seek challenges and freedom at work and accept the ensuing burden of responsibility. All workers have a drive for workmanship and want to develop their natural talents to the fullest. Drucker was disappointed and frustrated by the fact that bureaucratic managers were not ready to empower their employees as prescribed by MBO, yet he never seriously envisioned the possibility that someone could not be attracted by, or be suited to, the kind of work encompassing high levels of freedom and responsibility.

Other critics argued that Drucker's vision was too simple and optimistic, that he naively took it for granted that good management brought about peace and prosperity. If every employee really aspired to become Drucker's idealised knowledge worker, had the ability to reach his enviable status and could subsequently enjoy middle-class lifestyle, then it would be possible to achieve a sort of capitalism without class. Besides, trust within the workplace was not an implicit precondition as Drucker preached, but arose from well-understood interests about which he was rarely explicit. Benevolence was not altruism. It was to organisations' benefit to control, encourage and make their employees' progression and continuous development a reality whenever these were possible. Druckerism thus appears as a legitimating stance, not only of management as a profession and discipline, but also of corporate capitalism. In light of his life-long aversion to Marxism and his enthusiasm for privatisation, these critics dismissed Drucker's work as that of an ideologue denying or systematically understating the negative consequences of management and capitalism (Gantman 2005, pp. 72–74).

Perhaps. Drucker was a devout Christian and could not abandon his hope in man. His conviction that people at work want to achieve was not, or not simply, naiveté on his part, though. He held that experience generally confirmed this insight and insisted that no alternative was ethically or practically possible. To assume that employees were immature, lazy or irresponsible was tantamount to believing that managers were psychologically superior to subordinates viewed as incomplete or socially maladapted individuals. Management then becomes psychotherapy; manipulation replaces instructions and rewards. Drucker called this psychological despotism. The main purpose of psychology is 'to acquire insights into, and mastery of, oneself; [...] to use psychology to control, dominate and manipulate others [was] abuse of knowledge [and] a particularly repugnant form of tyranny' (1974, pp. 243–244). Not only is such a practice ignoble and contemptuous, but it is also self-destructive for it demands that managers are omniscient psychologists, mastering an infinite variety of theories and techniques. Such managers would become their first casualties, quickly blundering and impairing

performance: 'a manager who pretends that the personal needs of the subordinate, [...] rather than the objective needs of the task, determine what should be done, would not only be a poor manager; no one would—or should— believe him. All he does is to destroy the integrity of the relationship and with it the respect for his person and function' (p. 245). The relationships of psychologist and client and of manager and subordinate were for Drucker mutually exclusive.

Throughout a long life, Drucker believed that society was not all that there is, not even for itself (on the importance of this theme in Drucker's thought, see Starbuck 2009). He was obsessed with the notions of authority and legitimacy beyond the world of managers and corporations. He concerned himself with management as a profession because, from his early foray into the origins of totalitarianism, he remained terrified of what happened when economic elites fail in their moral duties. When they do, they surrender their legitimacy and society collapses. Economics cannot be the last frontier. The profit motive of commercial organisations should not be the dominant one if society is to remain harmonious, stable and peaceful. Profitability, for Drucker, meant responsibility. The urgent and immense importance of moral purpose within and beyond organisations is a defining feature of his work (Kantrow 2009, p. 80). In this outline, Drucker can be analysed as attempting either a synthesis of European humanistic, collectivist philosophy and of American individualist entrepreneurship (Waring 1992), or a modern reassembly of Aristotelian moral philosophy (Kurzynski 2012).

Managing, Heroically

While there are merits to such views, Drucker's work lends itself to a more encompassing analysis when read through the lens of ancient heroism. The defining features of the heroic worldview outlined above appear in his management books.

To start with stylistic observations, what Drucker wrote is not necessarily simple, but it remains always simply written. The exemplary clarity of his prose, what has been called his 'discipline of mind' (Kantrow 2009, p. 72), from which derives the persuasiveness of his arguments, is a reflection of his commitment to action words, tangible terms and concepts. Management is all about 'tasks, responsibilities and practices'. The world that Drucker described and the rules he prescribed are easy to understand because the terms through which they are articulated are themselves easy to understand.

The parallels with Homer run much deeper, however. Homer extolled heroic life as a constant pursuit of glory; he never granted his characters the possibility of temporarily standing outside their role or of questioning their worldview, for such questioning would threaten their existence and that of their society. Drucker tirelessly promoted corporate life, and his deepest belief was that people, especially managers, wanted to perform at work and see their organisations succeed within a stable and harmonious society which they would consolidate. He could not conceive of any other stance; questioning that assumption would have, in his view, catastrophic nihilistic consequences. In a heroic context, failure is moral failure that threatens the survival of the group; good intentions are irrelevant. For Drucker, it was executives' inescapable responsibility not only to deliver profits to ensure organisational survival, but also to accept that public good conditions private interests. Terms like 'values', 'commitment' and 'common goal' recur in his books—behind apparent plain 'business sense' often emerge rigid and at times heavy-handed prescriptions. Failure to recognise, accept and make good on management's organisational and social responsibilities was moral failure of the first order. Good intentions are not acceptable substitutes, there more than elsewhere.

Social roles define the *Iliad*'s characters, to which are attached rules, performance expectations and rewards. Homer's heroes recognise only successes; warriors form the dominating group from which their kings emerged. Drucker explained that workers and managers have specific tasks and responsibilities, that they are to perform according to high workmanship standards, and that they are accountable for their results and rewarded or penalised accordingly. Homer's heroes had to perform or be slain; Drucker's managers have to perform or be fired. He maintained that result-producing functions matter more than support activities and that contribution to organisational objectives determines ranking and access to top management. The kings of the *Iliad* disagree at times vigorously, yet put their quarrels aside in the name of contribution and success. Drucker believed that consensus and harmony within the organisation are distractions that must not influence what workers do; within limits, disagreement is source of contribution. Achaeans and Trojans know what they are to achieve (defeat of the enemy) and fall into despair when other considerations over-shadow this overall objective. Drucker's overarching argument was that the setting and cascading of clear objectives are management's core activities in the absence of which organisational survival, let alone success, is impossible. Homer has no psychology or psychological language to offer, except one that disregards the idea of an internal actor in favour of a strict focus on external behavioural standards. Drucker argued that psychology was irrelevant and in fact detrimental to the way employees were to lead,

follow and achieve. In the *Iliad*, the hero is he who accepts in full his role and enacts it by recognising that duties must take precedence over emotions, these tricks that gods use to lead men astray. For Drucker, workers achieve maturity and recognition through self-control; using psychology to control others is ignoble and self-defeating tyranny.

Drucker's MBO inherits heroism's Achilles' heel. If Drucker could insist, as much as he did, on self-control and responsibility, believing that workers not only desired but also could achieve these qualities, it is because their scope was quite limited. Responsibility, in Drucker's terms, is to remain 'organised' (1974, p. 265). Freedom is 'under the law' of the organisation and is bound by workmanship standards (1989, p. 134); in other words, it is severely constrained. What one is to control and is free to do is exclusively that which managers have one to do according to standards one has to accept. Managers separate planning from performing and transfer all responsibility for their organisation's survival to those in charge of defining its overarching objectives. While this sounds trite, the point to note is that, within the MBO perspective, one's career hinges entirely on meeting one's objectives. That these objectives are narrow-minded, or inadequate is beside the point. If a manager is required to perform according to inappropriate standards, he has few practical opportunities to voice concerns, except perhaps to his immediate superior, who may or may not be prepared to discuss the matter with him. Not every organisation will have the good fortune of having an Odysseus, his loyalty to his king, his long-term vision, his shrewdness and his rhetorical powers, in its ranks. In a heroic organisation, an Achilles is a more probable figure. Such a potentially destructive manager embodies the risk that a Druckerian organisation must remain ready to face: a powerful but protean executive blinded by his own agenda and ready to risk the ruin of his entire organisation, as Achilles does when he withdraws his troops after his quarrel with Agamemnon. After the German surrender, Patton stirred controversy for suggesting in earnest that American troops push their advantage and drive the Red Army back to Russia. Organisational politics and international diplomacy have reasons that heroic managers cannot understand.

Drucker repeatedly emphasised the importance of innovation throughout his books; given the premises of MBO though, one fails to see how it can be possible (Roth 2009). Genuine innovation means risk-taking and risk-taking means the possibility of failure yet the latter is as intolerable within MBO as it is in the *Iliad*. Even though he was adamant that managers should strive for effectiveness more than for efficiency (1974, pp. 45–46), the latter is the more likely outcome of MBO. At best, one can expect small-scale innovation and marginal improvement. That assigned objectives are by necessity short-term (since managers evaluate them in the coming months rather than in the coming years) means that the entire organisation will inevitably suffer from the travails of short-termism. Not every organisation will have a Penelope at its helm, ready to wait for 20 years for a promise to come true. Indeed, critics have accused Drucker of continuing the Taylorist and bureaucratic traditions under a different name (Waring 1992, p. 230), pointing to Drucker's not infrequent positive comments on Taylor (see 1989, pp. 274ff. for an instance of Drucker's praise). His passion for Japan and his persistent praise of continuous improvement, Japanese style, tell this story better than a long analysis. If many technological improvements as well as efficient management techniques have come from Japan, then genuinely innovative products or break-through business practises are not parts of this country's otherwise rich legacy. Little surprise here since heroism, Bushido style, still influences Japanese society.

To the reader of Homer, *The Practice of Management* and its sequels have, then, an unmistakeable flavour: the managers that animate Drucker's examples and case studies remind one of the characters that populate the *Iliad* for they share similar attributes and behave in consistent fashion. Drucker's MBO is ancient heroism transposed to management. Even the Christian existentialism that emerges from some of Drucker's pages (Starbuck 2009), evident through his obsession with freedom and responsibility, is compatible with this analysis. This is the case because existentialism incorporates heroic elements, especially the view that man is what he does (Spillane 2007, p. 319). Ancient heroism is the Ariadne's thread with which Drucker's management writings are amenable to coherent analysis and the solution to what commentators have called 'Drucker's puzzle' (see Lamond 2010 and Kanter 1985).

The debate whether management, as an academic discipline, should be regarded as belonging to the sphere of social science or to that of the humanities is as old as management education itself. It has recently been revived by the publication of two books arguing for one or the other view (O'Connor 2012; Colby et al. 2011 respectively). Although it is unlikely to settle the debate, the present article is an indirect contribution to the latter view insofar as it reveals how the works of a prominent management author can be articulated in the terms of what is perhaps the best known of all Classics. The last fifteen years have also seen the publication of a small but growing body of literature calling for analyses of management or organisational concepts in philosophical terms (Chia and Morgan 1996; Lynch and Dicker 1998; Laurie and Cherry 2001; Chia 2002; Türengül 2007 or Girin 2011). Again and although much remains to be written on this theme, the foregoing vindicates this call.

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2.4 : Management without theory for the 21st century

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Management without theory for the twenty-first century

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper analyses the origin, conceptual underpinnings and consequences of the idea of management theory. It argues that despite claims to incommensurability and except for critical studies authors, management researchers come together in their quest for performativity. The search for theory has condemned management scholars to espouse structural-functional-positivist assumptions. As such, mainstream management theorists assume and promote psychological determinism. Equivocations, ambiguities, tautologies and imprecise language obscure this implication, however, hollowing out management theory of its performative quality. A century after its inception, the quest for management theory has failed. Another avenue for management scholarship exists, one in which management history is a major contributor.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper offers a historical and conceptual analysis, relying on relevant philosophy of science scholarship. The object of study is the concept of management theory.

Findings – Most commentators on management theory rely on a widespread view (of postmodern lineage) according to which incommensurable management research paradigms exist. Allowance made for critical management studies, this paper argues otherwise, namely, that current management research paradigms are merely variations on a positivist theme. It further contends that mainstream management research has failed in its quest to identify theory, even if the language used to report research findings obfuscates this fact.

Research limitations/implications – A notable implication of this paper is that management academics should reconsider what they do and in particular abandon their quest for theory in favour of management history.

Originality/value – This paper builds on arguments that philosophers of science and scholars specialising in sociological analysis have long recognised to offer a new thesis on management theory in particular and management academia in general.

Keywords Management theory, Scientific management, Science, Postmodernism, Positivism

Paper type Research paper

In everyday language, a theory is a speculation or hypothesis, a loosely substantiated conjecture about a general or particular aspect of human experience. In scientific and scholarly literature, the term acquires a more precise meaning and stands for a group of statements about the world and their logical consequences (Bogen, 2017). Scientific theories range from descriptions of regularities observed in natural or experimental conditions, to laws, like Newton's, that are universally applicable. In all cases, the validity of theories goes beyond the phenomena that underwrote their formulation, all other things remaining the same. That is, scientific theories express permanence and causality: they describe and codify patterns deemed stable enough to serve as bases for predictions about unobserved phenomena, thus allowing for their control. Lyotard (1984) called "performativity" this predictive, instrumental quality of scientific theories.

Management researchers have embraced the performativity of scientific theories. In management studies, a theory is a testable proposition through which scholars describe organisational phenomena with the view of predicting the occurrence and controlling the course of similar ones (Shapira, 2011, p. 1313; Sutton and Staw, 1995, p. 378; Gioia and Pitre, 1990, p. 587). To contribute to management theory, researchers study managers' environment and behaviour as well as their consequences, in the hope of identifying regular relationships between them. Once identified, such relationships are codified as management theories, that is, become formal expectations that identical consequences will follow should the same behaviour be repeated, everything else remaining equal.

Donning the mantle of science has enabled management to acquire the status of an academic discipline (Locke, 1989). At university, if students cannot practice management, they can study theory. Theoretical knowledge offsets a lack of experience of future managers by allowing them to predict organisational phenomena, including the effects of their own behaviour. Theory also helps current managers improve their practice (Christensen and Raynor, 2003). In other words, theory allows managers to manage like engineers engineer and doctors heal patients: safely, reliably and on the back of a formal body of theoretical knowledge acquired at university. Such has been in any case management academia's overall promise since its inception (Khurana, 2007). A convincing pledge: while business and management programmes have established themselves as the most popular ones among US undergraduates (about 20 per cent of current enrolments), faculty in business, management and related disciplines command the highest salaries, only outdone by academics in legal studies (Snyder *et al.*, 2018; CUPA-HR, 2016).

After a short survey of the origins and main historical developments of the idea of management theory, this article examines its conceptual underpinnings and consequences. It argues that the quest for theory that preoccupied management academics during the twentieth century has failed. To survive this failure, the academy must reinvent its objectives. The conclusion adumbrates a possible avenue for such a reinvention, one in which studies in management history play a central role.

The birth of management theory

If the origins of management thought date back to ancient philosophy (Joullié and Spillane, 2015a), management theory has a more recent history. Commentators (Kiechel, 2012) have located its formal birth in the address that Henry Towne delivered in May 1886 to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. In his talk, Towne lamented that although engineering was in his days already endowed with a formal body of knowledge, the "management of works" was still a scholarly orphan. In Towne's view, the missing discipline would be rooted in economics, as management's ultimate objective is economic gain.

Despite calling for its development, Towne came short of uttering the expression "management theory". He was also seemingly unaware that, over a century before his talk, an economist had laid the first foundation of the notion. In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Smith indeed argued that division of labour contributes to economic growth through increased efficiency, although also widening the distance between workers and employers. Empirical confirmation of Smith's insight became available when, in the first decade of the twentieth century, Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford showed that manufacturing process simplification and standardisation made spectacular productivity gains possible, enabling in turn lower consumer prices and increased wages. Unlike Towne, Taylor (1919, p. 27) did use the term "theory" to refer to his "principles of scientific management". Although industrialist and social reformer Robert Owen (1771-1858) preceded Taylor in advancing

principles to regulate cooperative work, the latter can justifiably claim the title of first self-conscious management theorist[1].

Following Smith, Taylor insisted on the distinction between mental and physical work, that is, between managing (task specification and planning) and executing. With the control of the work, prestige and power went to the production managers. As Smith predicted, workers resented such a loss of status and many went on strike where industrialists implemented Taylor's ideas. Theirs was a lost cause: once scientific management had proved its mettle in a variety of settings, the idea that management can be systematised, that is, that there are reliable techniques available to managers the implementation of which makes their organisation more profitable, proved irresistible. The quest for management theory had begun.

Early twentieth-century management theorists contemplated a vast research programme. In an effort to improve workshop productivity and in the spirit of Taylor's time and motion studies, the US National Academy of Sciences launched in 1924 a series of experiments at Western Electric's Hawthorne Plant in Cicero, IL. The results of the Hawthorne Studies were puzzling at first although productivity within a small group of women assembling relay parts improved, no change in environmental conditions, in work schedules or even in incentives could explain why. A succession of rejected hypotheses led to the Studies' abandonment, until Mayo (2004 [1933]) revived them by considering the relationships that developed between workers, between workers and their supervisor and between the entire group under analysis and the researchers. In his view, work organisations, extended to those studying them, were "social systems" transforming inputs into outputs.

Mayo taught at Harvard Business School, then (as now, if to a lesser extent) renowned for its MBA programme and case-based teaching. However, if Harvard's business degree met with great success, its pedagogy (inspired from that of its Law School) remained an exception. Indeed, the case method implies that each situation, each organisation is different and therefore that no overall theory applies. Elsewhere, the quest for universal principles applicable beyond the factory floor continued. Chester Barnard (1968 [1938]) held for instance that work organisations are cooperative systems. If, unlike the Catholic Church, they rarely survive for long, Barnard argued, it is mainly because they do not meet two essential criteria. These, for Barnard, were effectiveness and efficiency, defined as attainment of collective purposes and fulfilment of personal motives, respectively. Accepting much of Barnard's analysis, Simon (1997 [1947]) outlined the foundations of an "administrative science". In the management of administrations, Simon argued, efficiency must receive the highest priority and decision-making is the most important process. This endeavour, which rests on logical and mathematical considerations, requires distinguishing value judgements from factual observations. However, since, as Barnard taught, efficiency involves personal motives, decision-making is never entirely rational. It is "bounded" by the values of the decision maker. Not that this individual is beyond scientific study and understanding: intelligence is merely computation and human beings are simple "behaving systems", complex only insofar as they respond to an environment that is itself complex (Simon, 1996 [1969]).

Simon joined what would become the Carnegie School of Industrial Administration (GSIA) in 1949. Staffed with social scientists, economists, psychologists and mathematicians, almost all of whom would become famous, the GSIA soon established itself as a leading business school and model to imitate. For instance, when in 1959, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching delivered a report railing against the poor academic standards of management programmes, it took GSIA's programmes and discipline-based research as benchmarks (Khurana and Spender, 2012; Mintzberg, 2004,

pp. 22-29). Owing to the endorsement of the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and to generous grants made available to those institutions that implemented its prescriptions, the 1959 Carnegie Foundation report reshaped management academia first in North American then worldwide. The search for universal principles (combined with GSIA's emphasis on decision-making based on quantitative methods) was thereby confirmed as the academy's overriding agenda.

Working along Simon at the GSIA, Igor Ansoff applied quantitative methods to long-term corporate planning. As part of this effort, Ansoff coined the expression "corporate strategy", then an unknown and empty phrase to which an eponymous book (Ansoff, 1965) gave substance and popularity. Ansoff was an academic pioneer, but he was neither the first nor the only one to promote strategy as a management concern. In 1963, Bruce Henderson had started what would a few years later become the Boston Consulting Group, a management consultancy hailing "business strategy" as its specialty (BCG, 2013). Studying historical data, Henderson found that the evolution of manufacturing costs follows in most industries a predictable pattern, which corporate portfolio managers can use to decide on investments and divestments. Bringing the mathematical rigour of his PhD in economics, Michael Porter (1980, 1985) provided additional theoretical support to his predecessors' work. He notably argued that organisations determine their strategy after examination of the "competitive forces" that operate in their industries. Chief executives respond to these forces by following one of three possible generic strategies, which Porter analysed as chains of value-adding activities and resources. Among these are competitive advantages, the attributes that enable an organisation to outperform its competitors.

At Harvard Business School, Porter's work on strategic management was that of a maverick. More representative of his institution's pedagogical tradition and overall approach to management scholarship was Alfred Chandler. In his landmark book, Chandler (1977) studied the evolution of large American businesses and their economic role. He held in particular that these enterprises' managers visibly discharge the function that Smith attributed to invisible market mechanisms, namely efficient resource allocation. Chandler's thesis thus amounts to a teleological view of organisational history, a view in which business organisations take particular forms to perform particular economic tasks. Significantly, however, Chandler did not advance a theory of management; his is a theory of management history.

Mayo studied people working in groups, Simon analysed decision-making, Ansoff investigated corporate investments, Henderson delved into manufacturing costs, Porter mapped corporations' strategies, while Chandler tracked the evolution and economic contribution of large businesses. In the same decades, operations research came into being (Wilson, 2018). Despite their differences, all these endeavours, for successful and influential as they have been on their own, belong to the same tradition. Called by Kiechel (2010, p. 4) "Greater Taylorism", this tradition is more accurately described as structural-functionalist-positivist (SFP) for reasons to be exposed shortly. It is a tradition that assumes that management research is a scientific endeavour because it aims at an objective similar to that of the natural sciences: the production of a performative body of knowledge. In one word: theory.

Theoretical foundations

The quest for management theory has not ended since the days of the pioneers mentioned in the foregoing. More appropriate today is to speak of management theories. Taylor based his theory on the view that line workers only execute, not organise, their work. Conversely, Mayo took account of employees' interpretations of the experiment he supervised at Hawthorne. Different levels of analysis produce different management theories. Already in

1961, Koontz lamented a theoretical "jungle", identifying first six, then eleven distinct families of theories less than two decades later (Koontz, 1961, 1980). The jungle has not receded since: an overarching criterion for article acceptance in a leading management journal today is that the research it reports extends existing theory or builds new theory.

About the phenomena they study, what these phenomena encompass and how to study them, management researchers develop clusters of assumptions. For instance, scholars wanting to develop a theory describing how people behave in organisations must first define what they believe qualifies (or not) as an organisation, what kind of behaviour is relevant and what kind is not. As the examples of Taylor and Mayo illustrate, however, such definitions rest themselves on different conceptions about human nature and social reality. Underlying the plethora of management theories lies therefore another profusion, that of ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions. Different clusters of assumptions lead to different conclusions about how to conduct management research, about what kind of phenomena should attract researchers' attention and therefore about what counts as a management theory. Such is the view, in any case, advanced by business research textbooks (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

In management and organisational studies, an influential study of the assumptions scholars espouse when conducting their research is Burrell and Morgan (1979). At the time of writing, the work has attracted over 13,500 citations according to Google Scholar; twenty-two years ago, the work's influence was already judged "hegemonic" (Deetz, 1996, p. 191). That Burrell and Morgan's study has been influential does not mean it has proved consensual, however. For example, disagreement exists about the number of research frameworks, their names or the research practices they produce. Thus, in place of the four frameworks identified by Burrell and Morgan, authors have proposed three (Locke, 2001, pp 7-12) or two (Lakomski and Evers, 2011; Boisot and McKelvey, 2010; Clegg and Ross-Smith, 2003). Whatever its merits, Burrell and Morgan's work has shaped discussions about such matters.

Burrell and Morgan (1979, pp. 21-25) called "paradigms" the four clusters of assumptions that frame management and organisational research and named them "functionalist", "interpretivist", "radical structuralist" and "radical humanist". In their view, these paradigms are incommensurable because they rest on fundamentally incompatible views about social science and social reality, thus leading to radically different research practices, objectives and results. For instance, researchers working as per the radical structuralist and functionalist paradigms share an emphasis on an objective study of social reality, while those inscribing themselves in the radical humanist and interpretive paradigms believe that social phenomena can only be understood subjectively. That is, it is the perspective and intentions of those individuals the behaviour of whom is studied that primarily concern the latter group of scholars, not the actual manifestations or consequences of that behaviour (which concern the former group of researchers). However, still according to Burrell and Morgan, adepts of the interpretivist and functionalist paradigms promote social regulation, while those scholars following the radical humanist and the radical structuralist paradigms stimulate research enabling social change.

Burrell and Morgan's (1979, pp. 32-33) radical humanist scholars deserve further exposition, for their conception of research sets them apart. These researchers believe indeed that ideological constructs dominate human consciousness and estrange human beings from their full potentialities. In particular, radical humanists see a science of management as a concept leading to alienation, with the Taylorisation of the workplace held as a prime example of such dehumanisation. In the radical humanist perspective, the trust invested in management as an applied science is one of these ideological barriers to human fulfilment.

Radical humanist scholars thus see their mission as identifying the multifarious manifestations of the management science ideology and helping fellow human beings in their attempts to liberate themselves from it.

A critical evaluation of Burrell and Morgan's classification is not immediately relevant to the present argument (Hassard and Cox, 2013, Deetz, 1996 are examples of such evaluations). Similarly, whether the paradigms Burrell and Morgan identified are truly incommensurable or can be somehow reconciled is a question that can wait, at least for now. General comments about management research are in order before a discussion on such matters is possible.

Structural-functionalist-positivist management research
Beyond their disagreements, authors who have analysed the assumptions underpinning management research grant, if under a different name, a dominant role and influence to the sort of research that Burrell and Morgan called "functionalist". For instance, while Clegg and Ross-Smith (2003) and Johnson and Duberley (2000) have called such research "positivist", Boisot and McKelvey (2010) and Locke (2001) have preferred to name it "modernist" and Lakomski and Evers (2011) "empiricist". Although connected, these terms deserve to be distinguished.

"Modernism" refers to a period in the history of Western ideas, arts and culture, with roots in the nineteenth century but culminating in the first decades of the twentieth century. "Empiricism" is the view, developed from the sixteenth century onward, that the exclusive source of knowledge is experience, that is, information conveyed by the senses. Positivism is a philosophy of science first given systematic exposition by Auguste Comte (1798-1957) and further developed in the 1920s and 1930s (Kolakowski, 1969). Positivist science accepts the empiricist premise: it studies reality in its phenomenal manifestations. It ignores moral values to focus exclusively on facts, defined as corroborated, intersubjective sense data. Accordingly, positivist scientists strive for objective (value-free) observations of phenomena, from which they infer theories that they confront to new observations by way of predictions and experiments. In the natural sciences, positivism is the exclusive research model.

Functionalism is not a philosophy of science, but a conception of social reality. Although often said obsolete, functionalism is still central to general sociology (Kingsbury and Scanzoni, 2009). Functionalists believe that they can adequately describe any social phenomenon (institution, pattern of behaviour, norm or belief) in the terms of the function (and of the effects this function) this phenomenon discharges on other phenomena under analysis, irrespective of the intentions of the individuals that animate or harbour it (Spillane and Martin, 2005, pp. 112-113). As Radcliffe-Brown (1940) long argued, however, functionalism is intimately associated with another sociological ontology, namely structuralism. Structuralism is the view that phenomena only exist through their relationships with larger, ordering structures (Blackburn, 2005, p. 353). The connection between functionalism and structuralism is a natural one, for the concept of relationship leads to that of function. Further, to speak of function is to imply that there is an entity that functions. If phenomena are only observable through relationships seen as manifestations of functions and if these functions manifest the existence of entities that can be decomposed into sub-entities, the difference between "function" and "structure" disappears. In this sense, dissociating functionalism from structuralism and holding them to be incommensurable views of social reality, as Burrell and Morgan did, is misguided; many authors understandably speak of structural-functionalism (Dew, 2014).

In social science, the structural-functionalist tradition is particularly visible in the work of Émile Durkheim (2002 [1897]). For Durkheim, society is the ultimate structure, a

determined, complete, coherent and self-regulating system made of causally interconnected components (structures). Among these are work organisations, which stand for and discharge social functions. Individuals do not exist as autonomous beings but only as components (substructures) of society and its institutions, i.e. as vehicles of the various social functions they simultaneously embody and discharge.

In management studies, the combination of structuralism, functionalism and positivism has been attractive to scholars. Indeed, the research framework such a combination produces provides immediate ontological, epistemological and methodological support to the quest for management theory. As per the structural-functionalist view, work organisations, their internal components and attributes, as well as their partners, suppliers, customers, etc., are nothing but structures, which discharge and embody stable and causally effective functions (relationships) on other structures. Further, as per the positivist research framework, the behaviour (function) of these structures is amenable to objective observation, thus ensuring the scientific status and value neutrality of the resulting management theory.

In the SFP perspective, management research is an endeavour modelled on that of natural science, resting on similar assumptions and aiming at the same overall objective of performativity: prediction and control by way of theories. Management is itself a practice conducted as per a body of theoretical knowledge, expressed in scientific language and grounded on objective observation and quantitative data analysis. Further, there are universal, value-free and predictive methods available to managers through which they can improve their practice. The SFP conception of management studies is that which Taylor pioneered and to which Simon and his peers at the GSIA first gave academic credentials. It has formed the backbone of management academia to this day (hence the qualifiers "traditional", "orthodox" or again "mainstream" that are also used to denote it). As attested by AACSB's mission statement, which is "to transform business education for global prosperity" (from the website), it is a conception of management research and practice that, in typical positivist fashion, equates scientific progress with social progress. The appearance of game theory, the rise of economics and finance in management schools' curricula and the preponderance of quantitative studies in management journals are signs that the SFP tradition is still gaining influence because quantitative analysis is associated with certainty, objectivity and instrumentality, all notions at the heart of the positivist research programme. "Evidence-based management", insofar as it is a research agenda and not merely a body of practice, is another outgrowth of the positivist branch of management studies.

Burrell and Morgan's radical structuralist account of management research, as its name indicates, hinges on the view that stable structures underpin social reality. Citing Marx as example, Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. 34) note that, for radical structuralists, "radical change is built in the very nature and structure of contemporary society", and that such structure "provide[s] explanations of the basic interrelationships within the context of total social formations". Interpretivist social researchers espouse this (structural-functionalist) conception of social reality insofar as they are committed to the position, as Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. 31) put it, that "the world of human affairs is cohesive, ordered and integrated". When Mayo spoke of causally effective 'social systems' to account for what happened at Hawthorne, he did not mean differently.

In *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation*, Weber (1969) argued that social scientists should inquire in the causes of unintended events, but ignore intended ones. If an event occurs as the deliberate result of an individual's action, this particular individual is the cause of that event, and there is no need to engage in scientific enquiry to discover what caused it. However, if the event is unintended, then its real causes are unknown and it is

therefore worthwhile to mobilise scientific means to discover them. Such a discovery will make it possible to judge whether the event in question will occur again or to control its occurrence. In this argument at least, Weber did not deviate from positivist science's overall performative agenda, that according to which the ultimate purpose of scientific knowledge is to expand and consolidate control of reality. The interpretive school of social research is not an alternative but a complement to the picture provided by the positivist account (Khurana, 2007, p. 394).

The radical humanist management researcher, according to Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. 32), has much in common with his interpretivist counterpart. Both believe in the existence of stable, causally effective superordinate arrangements of organisational reality buried in human consciousness (for instance in the shape of ideologies or moral constraints), which they strive to discover and codify. Radical humanists differ from interpretivists in how to use such knowledge: to regulate organisations for interpretive scholars and to change it for radical humanist researchers. In either case, however, scholars remain faithful to the performative programme of SFP research.

The four paradigms of management research identified by Burrell and Morgan (1979) share a central agenda. They are variations on the quest for stable, ordering and causally effective features underpinning organisational reality, the existence of which is assumed. In making this assumption, management researchers walk in the steps of their illustrious predecessors in social science, be it Marx, Durkheim or Weber, all of whom took the existence of causal trends or relationships structuring the social phenomena they studied for granted (Giddens, 2000, p. 239). The alleged incommensurability of Burrell and Morgan's research paradigms must therefore be requalified: in a crucial aspect, it is merely superficial. These paradigm differ not on the nature of the ultimate substratum of organisational reality (stable, causally effective structures), but on where to locate that substratum and how to study it.

Stable and causally effective structures form bases from which prediction and control of organisational phenomena are possible. For instance, if organisational cultures manifest themselves along fixed dimensions (stable and causally effective structures), then managers must take advantage of these dimensions when restructuring or regulating organisations (management theory). The idea that there is such a thing as a management theory to be discovered because there are such things as stable, causally effective features that determine organisational reality is therefore *the* theory underpinning all management theories. In this statement, however, "theory" is not to be understood in the scientific sense (i.e. as law-like generalisation stemming from past observations intended to predict future ones), but in the everyday sense, as mere speculation. Management researchers accept it *a priori* because without it, the performativity of their research cannot be justified. To put the matter somewhat differently, if management academics suffer from "physics envy" (Bygrave, 1989, p. 16), they also labour under a managerial bias. Indeed, the ultimate rationale of their research and objective of their theories is to provide means to organisational regulation or transformation, that is, executive control. Irrespective of their research paradigm, they are all, to reuse Baritz's (1960) expression, "servants of power".

Postmodern management research
Published in 1979, Burrell and Morgan's work could not include a discussion of a stream of management studies that is embryonic in their analysis but only emerged in the early 1990s[2]. This stream appears in later explorations of management research frameworks, albeit with a much weaker degree of agreement about what sort of research it consists of and to what sort of theories (if any at all) it leads. This is the research framework called "postmodern" (Hassard, 1994), "postpositivist" (Clegg and Ross-Smith, 2003), "postmodernist" (Lakomski and Evers,

2011; Boisot and McKelvey, 2010; Johnson and Duberley, 2000) or again "deconstructionist" (Hassard and Cox, 2013). Another name for this body of management research is "critical management studies" (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Adler *et al*, 2007). Supported by dedicated journals, postmodern management research, in its multifarious hues, represents today an active area of scholarship. However, even if many postmodern research themes have found their way in mainstream management scholarship (Hassard and Cox, 2013), postmodern management scholarship has had little influence on the content of management curricula. There are good reasons for this.

Along the lines opened by Burrell and Morgan's radical humanist scholars, postmodern management researchers seek to distance themselves from the tradition of Taylor and Simon because they are wary of its consequences. They, too, pursue a "political" research agenda insofar as they oppose what they believe are noxious effects of a science of management. What makes postmodern management scholars' position distinctive is their rejection of stable empirical referents. Following such thinkers as Foucault, Feyerabend and Derrida, postmodern management authors either reject the notion of "truth", with they see as an element of a discourse seeking domination, or, if they accept it, believe it to be inaccessible (Joullié and Spillane, 2015a, pp. 278-283). As a result, postmodern management authors are not merely suspicious of a science of management for being an instrument of social oppression; rather, they dismiss it altogether. They deny society a stable, neutral existence and see institutions, symbols, words and texts not as having fixed meaning or pointing to permanent entities. Rather, postmodernists analyse such components of social experience as repressive processes silencing other institutions, symbols, words and texts while promoting the agendas of incumbents, owners and authors. In the postmodern worldview, there cannot be a science of management because the objectivity demanded by SFP research is a delusion, a mirage: what passes for reality is in fact a fabrication, a socially constructed deception. The psychological self is an oppressive illusion of religious lineage and rationality is a markedly dangerous, because persuasive, form of lie. As for organisational life, it is politically motivated, a scene on which vested interests constantly play out and collide and therefore an experience escaping passive or neutral recording.

While there are merits to a critical view of organisational life, it is easier to understand what postmodern management scholars oppose than what they propose, if anything. This impotence is mainly the consequence of a radical (anti-) epistemological stance that condemns anyone who adopts it to an anti-performative position. Rejecting the idea that experience and reason are reliable instruments, postmodern management scholars find themselves in a perilous position when it comes to developing a logical argument from empirical premises; denying that organisational reality exists as a permanent object of study, they logically cannot recommend a course of action. Indeed, in the absence of stable, causally effective social structures, there is indeed no ground upon which theory could develop. Further, if postmodern management authors are correct in their views of social reality, their work itself must be dismissed for stemming from and embodying an ideology that is politically motivated, that is, oppressive in its intention.

Postmodernists will not allow logic or argument to come in their way, however. For instance, Chia and Holt (2009, pp. 9-10) recommend managers they downplay conscious decision-making, instrumental rationality and goal-directed behaviour; instead, managers are encouraged to let things happen by themselves. That is, Chi and Holt write a book (a deliberate behaviour, surely) to argue that managers should not argue or act deliberately. Equally inconsistent (if understandable) are calls by postmodern academics to continue research as per the postmodern agenda (Donaldson (2003) offers an extended discussion on this theme). To be fair, some postmodern management authors have recognised that embracing an anti-

epistemological posture amounts to pulling the carpet from underneath one's feet. They have tried to retain their balance through irony, autocriticism, self-effacement and (as last resort) by grasping at their readers, presumably hoping these would fall with them (Burrell, 1997).

The collapse of theory

The ethical, logical, epistemological and ontological difficulties met by researchers in social science have been long documented (Giedymin, 1975). In fact, it was their progressive articulation (in the hands of Weber, Adorno, Horkheimer and Popper, most notably) that spurred the development of the different versions of social research that Burrell and Morgan mapped. Various strategies are available to mitigate the difficulties that each generates in management studies (Johnson and Duberley, 2000; Boisot and McKelvey, 2010; Wicks and Freeman, 1998; Gioia and Pitre, 1990). Rather than these well-travelled themes, the following explores an overlooked aspect of management research's difficulties.

The main issues social researchers face in their work stem from the influence they inevitably exert on the individuals the behaviour of whom they study, the complexity of social phenomena, the impossibility of studying them in laboratory conditions and the challenge of identifying control groups. Considered together, these difficulties rule out explanations of social events similar to those advanced in the natural sciences, which are in terms of causes and effects of these causes. As Andreski (1969, p. 58) observed, at most, in social sciences, only "possibilistic" explanations can be advanced, that is, explanations why something could happen, not why it happened. In other words, in social science, explanations do not express sufficient conditions of occurrence of an event (causal explanation), but necessary conditions of occurrence. As such, explanations of social phenomena are not predictive and thus cannot be performative. Moreover, if one accepts the reality of free will, i.e. if one understands that human behaviour is by nature unpredictable, then one must also accept that causal explanations of social events are impossible in all cases where these events are determined by the choices of one or a handful of individuals. Such is typically the case in management situations where decision-making rests with one or a small number of people.

If the indeterminacy of human actions vitiates the possibility of causal explanations of social events, it follows that the possibility of causal explanation requires that human actions are predictable. Expressed differently, the quest for performative management theory must assume a degree of psychological determinism, at least on the part of those to whom the theory applies. For example, in *For Positivist Organisation Theory*, Donaldson (1996) argues that organisational decisions are contingent on phenomena over which managers and executives have no control, such as general economic conditions, competitors' offering, legal constraints or simply shareholders expectations. There is therefore no such a thing as strategic choice. Managerial free will, if it exists, is of negligible consequence; trying to account for it in management studies is a pointless endeavour. If true, this deterministic view of organisational reality leaves little room for such widely debated notions as business ethics and corporate social responsibility. Scholars engaged in these research agendas are misguided in their efforts.

Even if they do not share Donaldson's positivist commitment, management theorists, irrespective of their research paradigm, share his view on human agency. This is the case because if organisational reality is structured along stable and causally effective features (be they buried in the depths of human consciousness), then organisational life is ultimately determined in some aspects. These aspects are the phenomena that management researchers study, the occurrences of which their theories describe and predict. It is thus possible to determine future occurrences of these phenomena, like, for instance, the

behaviour of elementary particles is predictable and controllable by way of the electromagnetic forces theorised by physicists. As discussed, postmodern management scholars escape these comments at the cost of being incapable of proposing any management theory at all.

Being performative, management research requires and implies a degree of psychological determinism. Yet, bar for theorists like Donaldson (and postmodern researchers, if for opposite reasons), most management scholars do not realise this implication, as their concern for managerial and corporate responsibility attests. It thus behoves the present commentator to explain the discrepancy between what management researchers actually do and what most of them profess they do. Although such an argument requires more sustained development than space affords here, I submit in the following paragraphs that management authors do not recognise the psychological determinism implied in their research and conveyed by their theories because they obfuscate it, presumably unwittingly, behind a cloud of equivocations, ambiguities, tautologies and imprecise language.

Scholarly management and organisation literature offers equivocations aplenty. Although a systematic survey of the concerned literature is normally required to substantiate such an assertion, three examples will suffice to provide it credibility and prosecute the present case. They pertain to the use of "authority", "personality" and "motivation", three terms that are pervasive in management literature.

"Authority" is an ambiguous word most management authors leave undefined. Dictionaries (e.g. the *Merriam-Webster* on-line dictionary, accessed on 14 March 2018) acknowledge this ambiguity when they define the term as "the power to influence or command thought, opinion or behaviour". To influence is not to command, however: while the former verb leaves room for gradation of interpretation and thus psychological freedom, the latter does not and implies obedience. Thus, when Rojas (2010, p. 1264) writes in his study of academic authority "some actors [...] seek the authority to coerce others" and that "connections help individuals acquire the legitimate authority to influence events" (2010: p. 1265), he equivocates on the two meanings of the term and leaves the practical implications of his theory uncertain. Such an equivocation is doubly convenient. First, should the theory be implemented, the equivocation protects the theorist from the charge that his research does not result in employee coercion. Second and more to the point of the current discussion, the equivocation presumably leaves the same theorist unaware of the deterministic implications of his theory. Had the meaning of "authority" been clarified or a less ambiguous word like "power" or "control" been used, these implications would have been either avoided or made apparent.

"Personality" is a concept central to managerial psychology and to a large component of management and organisational behaviour literature. Although there are over 200 different definitions of personality (Spillane and Martin, 2005, p. 71), most of them advance personality as a stable psychological structure or process that confers individual behaviour an overall degree of consistency. In this perspective, personality explains (that is, causes) behavioural regularities (McRae and Costa, 1996, pp. 57-58). The concept of personality thus assumes that there are aspects of behaviour that remain beyond the volition of the individual. Notwithstanding claims to the contrary, the psychological determinism of personality theories is particularly evident in the view of personality as a bundle of stable traits (dispositions) existing within the person and controlling his or her behaviour (Clarke, 2009). Behavioural predictions based on personality tests have been the goal and the justification of personality research since its beginnings (Baritz, 1960, pp. 21-41).

The psychological determinism implied in personality psychology is not without consequences on personal freedom, intelligence and creativity. If individuals behave as per fixed psychological structures beyond their control, they are not completely free and thus not entirely responsible for what they do: they behave in ways constrained by their personality. It is illusory to expect from them behaviour outside of the range of activities that their personality allows. The narrower the range of activities in which the concerned individuals can engage, the more consistent their behaviour remains regardless of environmental conditions. In other words, the stronger the personality, the less intelligent (in the sense of adaptive) and the less creative the individual. Although this argument is of sound logic and in accord with explanations of aberrant or deviant behaviour in terms of personality factors or mental illnesses (Spillane and Martin, 2005, pp. 72-74), it is not widely recognised by management authors. This state of affairs is evident in the use of such oxymoronic expressions as "creative personality" (Oldham and Cummings, 1996), "imaginative personality" (Kartono et al., 2017) or again "intelligent personality" (Bartone et al., 2009), which are common in literature.

Finally, "motivation" is a concept often found in management and organisational behaviour articles and textbooks, if generally left without a clear definition. When a definition is provided, it is typically along the lines provided by Griffin and Moorhead (2012, p. 90), that is, one which conceives of motivation, in Newtonian language, as "the set of forces that causes people to engage in one behavior rather than some alternative behavior". In this reading, motivation is a causally effective factor, the reach of which is inescapable: motivated employees are caused to behave as they do (that is, they do not act but react). These individuals' intentions and free will, should they exist, are of no consequence. In ordinary language, however, motivation has a different meaning. As the *Oxford Online Dictionary* attests (accessed on 20 February 2018), motivation typically refers to a reason for acting in certain ways, a desire to do something, that is, a volition, a fear, an incentive or an objective. This definition makes room for choice and free will: if a motivation is a reason for action and not a cause for reaction, then one can change one's behaviour by changing one's motivation. As is the case for "authority" and "personality", the equivocation that surrounds "motivation" is convenient for authors, for it hides, perhaps even to themselves, the determinism of their theories. It also makes their theories unfalsifiable, thus unscientific in Popper's (2004) sense, because whatever experimental evidence produced will be compatible with the theory. Should "motivated" employees behave as expected, motivation-as-cause will figure centrally in results' interpretation; should these same employees not behave as expected, researchers will call on motivation-as-reason when interpreting the results of their experiment.

The aforediscussed equivocations and conceptual ambiguities allow management scholars to cloak their theories in a scientific veneer. In strategic management literature, circular reasoning provides the scientific varnish. In two distinct streams of publications, Powell (2001, 2002) and Priem and Butler (2001a, 2001b) have indeed observed that, since competitive advantages and valuable resources are only identified within successful organisations, these competitive advantages and valuable resources cannot, in and of themselves, explain these organisations' successful performance. Implying, as Porter (1985) and countless strategic management authors do, that competitive advantages or valuable resources produce organisational success thus amounts to implying that organisations are successful because they are successful. The proposition is true, but trivially so. It does not state a theory but only a tautology without predictive, let alone performative, content.

Strategic management literature is not alone in advancing tautologies masquerading as scientific theories. Tautological propositions also abound in the "implications for practice"

sections of management articles. Bartunek and Rynes (2010) reviewed 1,738 empirical articles published in five leading management and management-related journals in 1992 and 1993 and between 2003 and 2007. Bartunek and Rynes (2010, p. 105) found that, overall, 74 per cent (up to 89 per cent for some journals, depending on the year considered) of these "implications for practice" sections rely on tentative language, that is, make use of "may", "speculate", "potentially" or other words of similar meaning. Propositions expressed in this sort of language are either tautological or unfalsifiable; in both cases, they have no empirical implications.

Although Bartunek and Rynes based their analysis on articles published in 1992-1993 and 2003-2007, recent exemplars are not difficult to identify, showing that the phraseology they identified is still prevalent. For example, Su and Tsang (2015, p. 1143) write, as practical implications of their research, that "results suggest that firms may strategically control the scope of the secondary stakeholders in which they are interested". The verb "suggest" signals that the proposed interpretation contains a part of subjectivity, that other researchers could interpret the same results differently; the modal "may" indicates that the opposite result is possible. If the sentence has some appearance of performativity, it has none of its core attributes, namely, objectivity and causality.

Tentative and speculative language, like the equivocations, conceptual ambiguities and tautologies reviewed earlier, obfuscates management literature's inherent determinism and hollows it out of practical consequences. In both cases and crucially, such language does not convey theoretical knowledge. Sentences like "X suggests Y", "X may cause Y" and "X potentially triggers Y" imply that Y does necessarily follow from X, that something else, or nothing at all, can possibly follow from X. That such formulation is so widespread in, indeed typical of, management literature shows that scholars, despite their intentions to identify and codify theory, have been incapable of doing so.

If management research is a quest for performativity, this goal has disappeared from its practical conclusions. When engaging in management research, scholars assume that stable, causally effective structures underpin the way organisations operate, yet the language these same scholars use to report the result of their research implicitly but unambiguously betrays the inexistence of such structures. The fact is that management researchers have yet to identify a single theory they can apply in the world of organisations with the same reliability that physicists apply theirs in the world of objects. The limitations, weaknesses and adverse social consequences of scientific management, the first and perhaps most successful of all management "theories", need no rehearsal here: scientific management is not the panacea, the "one best method" Taylor (1919, p 25) insistently claimed it was. The promise of performativity made by management academics has remained a promise. Except in their intentions and research hypotheses, there is no such a thing as a management theory. This failure of management theorists illustrates Gellner's (1986, pp. 126-127) argument that, if science is characterised by its ability to generate consensual, cumulative knowledge capable of improving human existence by way of predictions and controls (i.e. what Lyotard called science's performativity), then the so-called "social sciences" are not scientific.

Conclusion: management scholarship for the twenty-first century

The idea of management theory has had a successful run since its inception in the first decade of the twentieth century. From Taylor to Simon to Porter (and countless others), the contention that there exists a theoretical body of knowledge enabling managers reliably and predictably to improve their practice has been widely accepted. Management education

hinges on this conception, to which thousands of management scholars around the world have given flesh – or so it seems.

In scholarly literature, theory is a performative and deterministic notion. Anyone proposing a theory about natural or experimental phenomena implies that, should the conditions that presided over their initial observation persist, these phenomena will continue to occur as they have occurred and can thus be controlled or at minimum predicted. Proposing a theory about particular phenomena thus amounts to claiming that the behaviour of these phenomena is predictable, that is, somehow determined. Applying the notion of theory to management and organisational concerns thus requires, implies and conveys the idea that the phenomena management scholars study are determined in some essential but inescapable ways. Organisations, however, are made of people; management is, ultimately, the management of people. The notion of theory applied to management involves a deterministic picture of human agency, one in which human beings, in some ways at least, do not act but react, do not behave as they wish but as they must.

To escape the psychological determinism of the structural-functional-positivist research agenda, management theorists have developed alternative ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions upon which to conduct research. Despite incommensurability claims by their advocates, these research frameworks are only superficially different. They come together in one central assumption: the existence of underlying stable and causally effective features of organisational life upon which to develop management theories. Scholars for whom this comment does not hold are those postmodern management researchers for whom there are no fixed structures in social reality and therefore no basis upon which to ground theory. Postmodern management scholars escape the charge of determinism but face that of theoretical paralysis and practical irrelevance.

Except for avowed positivists such as Donaldson, management scholars do not commit to the idea of psychological determinism; rather, they typically deny such a commitment. Nevertheless, if management theories were not deterministic in at least some of their aspects, there would be no way to justify their performativity and consequently their teaching in management schools. It is only because management theories are supposedly performative that their knowledge enables managers to improve their practice and management graduates to pretend to management positions.

Knowingly or not, willingly or not, management scholars obfuscate their commitment to psychological determinism by way of equivocations, conceptual ambiguities, tautologies, speculative wording and tentative language when reporting their theories. Constructs such as "personality" and "motivation", common in management literature, demand psychological determinism to be used as support of theories. However, they are typically employed as if this was not the case, thereby obscuring their meaning and fatally undermining theoretical models built upon them. The notion of "authority" (specifically its articulation with the concepts of "power" and "control") is rarely elucidated, leaving its practical implication uncertain. Circular reasoning is at the heart of competitive advantage and valuable resource theories, carving them out of empirical relevance. Finally, the sections of articles that spell out the practical implications of research rely in their vast majority on a language that denudes them of predictive application. Their theoretical content is only apparent and their performativity inexistent. The quest for management theory has failed.

A handful of scholars have perceived that management studies is facing a crisis of theory (Ghoshal, 2005), that current management scholarship is mostly irrelevant to theory, practice (George, 2014) and teaching (Pearce and Huang, 2012) and that management academia's legitimacy is now at risk (Khurana, 2007). Management academia must reinvent itself if it wants to survive these crises. If this reinvention goes through the abandonment of

theory to make room for managerial freedom and responsibility, then so be it. In any case, forfeiting the claim to theoretical knowledge will not be at management studies' cost. If the pursuit of theory cannot be reconciled with a world picture in which managers act, choose and are responsible for their decisions, then so much the worse for theory. Scholars receptive to this line of argument will remember, however, that an abandonment of theory must remain compatible with their academy's claim to instrumentality, if not to performativity. That is, unless they are ready to embrace critical management authors' practical irrelevance quagmire, scholars must find ways to make their research useful, if not predictive, to managers. The work of Peter Drucker, who never claimed to have a theory of management (and insisted there was no such a thing; Drucker, 1986, p. 39 and 99), shows that such an endeavour is possible.

For more than 2000 years, education for citizenship and community leadership was based on *studia humanitatis*, that is, on an engagement with the body of knowledge in which and through which people document and come to terms with their existence. To prepare himself for a senior administrative position, Machiavelli, to take one famous example, studied Latin, rhetoric, logic, diplomacy, history and philosophy. Such an education provides analytical and critical methods of inquiry rooted in an appreciation of diverse human values, skills that managers, as decision-makers, require. The critical evaluation of assumptions brings about the awareness of alternatives: intellectual freedom, citizenship engagement and moral leadership have no other possible origin. Critical analysis, however, is impossible in the darkness of an imprecise language, in the absence of moral references or in the chaotic outline of a world without history and intellectual foundations. Mastery of language and an appreciation of philosophical systems support the use of reason, encourage argument and produce mature individuals. Introductory courses in the humanities in general and in philosophy in particular have their place within management programs (Joullié (2016); see also Joullié and Spillane (2015b) who argue that Drucker's work should be received as an ancient philosophy applied to management).

It is possible, as Chandler (1977) did (as well as Marx and Weber, in their own ways), to read organisational history as governed by an overriding principle. The present analysis is itself an interpretation of the history of management theory through the lens of an overall pattern. History, however, is an immense tapestry, composed of innumerable interwoven threads. While it is tempting to make any of these threads look like the dominating motif, doing so comes at the expense of losing the entire tapestry and its fabric from sight. Moreover, it remains an enduring Humean insight that from a finite set of data (particular events) an indeterminate number of internally consistent interpretations can be inferred, including incompatible ones (Lipton, 2004: 9ff). In other words, if the past helps understand the present, if experience is a guide, it is not in and of itself a failsafe basis for prescription because the future remains underdetermined.

In human affairs, no behaviour is necessary. If their environment is complex, human beings are even more so and their decisions contain irrational elements that make them unpredictable. Rather than looking for management theory, scholars can choose to contribute to management history, provided, for reasons just exposed, that they guard themselves from reading it as an merciless master but rather take it as a guide, that is, as a servant to human reason. Chandler (1977) made sense of the economy of his time by analysing the role of businesses in the century that preceded it. While managers should be cognisant of his conclusions, Chandler himself did not pretend to have identified universal principles before which they must unconditionally bow.

Organisational and management best practices must be created before they can be studied and replicated. Expressed differently, instead of searching for elusive behavioural

causal theories, scholars have the option to expose organisational reasons and contexts, those that led to executive choices. Taking into account objectives and constraints, these researchers will elucidate the consequences of these choices and identify those that proved beneficial to the concerned individuals, their organisations and the economy. This is, in broad terms, what Chandler did. Besides, explaining decisions of managers, their tenets and their glorious or inglorious outcomes reveals what alternatives there were, what other options were possible, what could be done and what should not done should similar circumstances present themselves. Defeats are sobering, successes are fleeting, possibilities are attractive; all are sources of learning. A fertile research agenda awaits.

Notes

1. Besides Owen and Taylor, one must mention Charles Babbage, Henry Gantt, Henri Fayol as well as Frank and Lillian Gilbreth (among a few others) as pioneers of management theory (Wren and Bedeian, 2009).

2. Embryonic in two ways. First, because postmodern management research is a continuation of Burrell & Morgan's radical humanist research, for reasons to be provided. Second, because the very idea of (allegedly) incommensurable research paradigms, which underpins Burrell & Morgan's work, is itself of postmodern origin, for reasons that will also become apparent.

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Theory, explanation, and understanding in management research

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Abstract
Theory production has been a central focus of management research for decades, mostly because theory legitimizes both management research and, through its application, management practice as professional endeavors. However, such an emphasis on theory glosses over one of its constraining and particularized roles in scientific explanation, namely that theory codifies predictive knowledge. Committing to a 'traditional' or 'critical' understanding of theory thus amounts to embracing the view that prediction is achievable within a circumscribed field of study. Such an embrace is non-controversial in natural science. However, within the realm of management studies, it necessitates and smuggles in a strawman view of human existence, one which does not accommodate freedom and responsibility. This limitation of management theory explains its inadequate utility. This article argues that alternative avenues for management research exist.

Introduction

A common and long-established practice of leading management journals is that they require that authors make a theoretical contribution (Boer et al., 2015). Rabetino et al. (2020) note that such contributions are based on diverse ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions; embrace disparate conceptual approaches (behavioral, institutional, evolutionary, etc.); and seek to address differing organizational problems. Theoretical plurality also takes the form of development of new frameworks, testing of existing ones or extension of prevailing orthodoxy into new domains. Nonetheless, to reiterate, contribution to management theory (of one kind or another) is what editors of well-regarded scholarly journals typically expect from their prospective contributors. For example, the website of the *Academy of Management Review* states that the mission of the journal "is to publish theoretical

insights that advance our understanding of management and organizations." Similarly, as part of its stated objectives, the *Strategic Management Journal* "seeks to publish papers that . . . develop and/or test theory." Another example is the *Journal of Management*, which (as of January 2021) is "committed to publishing scholarly empirical and theoretical research articles."

The production of management theory has had two principal justifications. First, theory professionalizes researchers through creating a shared embrace of the scientific framework and commitment to disseminating findings using a common language. Second, theoretical knowledge acquired within the academy offsets the inexperience of novice managers and improves the practice of more seasoned ones (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). Scientific theory thus legitimizes both management research and practice as

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Due to a grammatical error, sentence Committing to theory a 'traditional' or 'critical' understanding of theory, thus amounts to embracing the view that prediction is achievable within a circumscribed field of study is now changed to Committing to a 'traditional' or 'critical' understanding of theory thus amounts to embracing the view that prediction is achievable within a circumscribed field of study.

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kind of data (quantitative or qualitative) and the level of analysis (micro, meso, or meta) used to generate management theories. Rather, for purposes of developing the current thesis and consistent with the view advanced by Hoskisson et al. (1999), it is assumed here that there is no consequential distinction between theory created from reflection on quantitative as opposed to qualitative data. Similarly, micro-, meso-, or meta-level contributions will be classified together as theory. Indeed, it will be argued that even if management theories differ in the nature of the data that support them, the level of analysis that led to their formulation, the conceptual approach along which they were developed, and the type of problems they are meant to address, they share a crucial characteristic. Specifically, theories are so classified because they prescribe, in one way or another, a stable relationship between variables (and thus constructs).

The structure of this article is as follows. Following the present introduction, first, the notion of theory in traditional management research is clarified using a discussion about the generic meaning of explanation in science. Salient conceptual and technical difficulties associated with the pursuit of theory in traditional management research are also presented. Second, noted challenges to theory and scientific explanation are explored through reference to exposition of the differences between natural and social science, completed with an examination of the construct of critical theory, which is often seen as (for reasons presented earlier) *the* alternative to traditional theory. This latter exercise will reveal that critical theory suffers from the same weakness that afflicts traditional theory. Third, non-theory-driven research avenues are highlighted. The article's conclusion is that theory has consequential shortcomings that have placed practitioners and those in the academy at an unnecessary disadvantage.

Theory and traditional management research

Law, theory, and explanation

Since the last decades of the 19th century, philosophers have debated the degree to which science explains and its mode of so doing. A long-time dominant perspective on this matter was formalized by Hempel (1965). This view is known as the deductive-nomological model of scientific explanation for its deductive and lawful (inviolate principles) components (Hempel's conception is also called the "covering law theory" or "received view"). Although Hempel's model is no longer mainstream in philosophy of science, its continuing influence justifies a short exposition.

According to Hempel (1965), a scientific explanation is an account of a phenomenon consisting of two components (pp. 247–251). The first is the *explanandum*, a structured description of what is being explained. The second is the *explanans*, a series of statements which specifies particular conditions and includes one or more laws, from which the *explanandum* deductively follows as a conclusion. An example provided by Hempel (1965, p. 246) is the following: The level of the element mercury rises in a thermometer in proportion to the temperature of the liquid in which the thermometer is immersed (*explanandum*). This rise occurs because (1) mercury is contained in a glass tube (particular conditions, first part of the explanans), (2) bodies expand in proportion to their heat, and (3) mercury's coefficient of expansion is greater than that of glass (two laws, second part of the *explanans*).

The deductive-nomological model of scientific explanation suffers from weaknesses the elucidation of which is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice to say that philosophers of science have proposed alternatives (for more details, see Salmon, 2006, or Godfrey-Smith, 2003). Two such substitutes dominate contemporary relevant literature: the so-called "causal" and "unificationist" modes of explanation (Godfrey-Smith, 2003, pp. 190–200). For proponents of the causal model (e.g., Salmon, 1998), to explain something in science is to provide detail about how that something is caused. In contrast, advocates of the unificationist perspective claim to approach the same problem through considering what scientists actually do, which (allegedly) is to develop explanatory schemes that can be widely applied. Unificationists thus hold that an explanation in science is an account that connects various facts and relationships by subsuming them under a set of general patterns and principles (Friedman, 1974; Kitcher, 1989). As such, unificationist science is best understood as an enterprise that strives to reduce the number of patterns and principles that must be accepted as fundamental.

Reconciling the causal and unificationist models of scientific explanation is not a necessary undertaking to advance this article's argument. Rather, two focused comments suffice for the task at hand. First, as Godfrey-Smith (2003, pp. 196–197) noted, leading proponents of each perspective have converged in their analyses, each side conceding ground to the other. The reasons for this meeting of minds are somewhat intuitive. On the one hand, a causal process can be seen as the manifestation of a general principle operating within material reality; on the other hand, a general principle, if it is to explain material change, can be conceived of as causal in nature. The difference between the causal and unificationist models thus seems more a matter of presentation than of substance. Second and more consequentially, both models (causal and unificationist) use the same semantic structure to formulate a scientific explanation, a structure that is indebted to Hempel's initial *explanandum-explanans* articulation. Namely, to explain something in science is to propose an account that goes from the general to the particular. Advanced on the basis of causal or unificationist logic, this shift rests on laws, be they universal (exception-less, that is, causal) or statistical (Friedman, 1974; Salmon, 1998; Woodward, 2017).[1]

professional vocations (Shapira, 2011; Thomas & Wilson, 2011).

Despite its merits, the quest for management theory has not been without detractors. Indeed, three decades ago, Van Maanen (1989) lamented the ephemeral nature of the theories that management research produces. It is unclear whether substantial progress has been accomplished since such opining. For example, *Academy of Management Journal* editor George (2014) observed that the more management studies proliferate, the more they resemble "black cats in coal cellars" (p. 1). At least three of his predecessors held a similar view. Specifically, Bartunek et al. (2006) stated in one of their editorials that management research does not produce much, if anything, that is "really interesting" (p. 9).

A notable criticism of theory-driven management research is that it has little, if any, relevance for practice and education. This concern is traceable to Porter and McKibbin (1988), who stated point-blank that management research "does not produce practically relevant outcomes" (p. 30). Very recently, Joullié and Gould (in press) provided compelling evidence that the bulk of management research output cannot be applied in workplaces. Moreover, Pearce and Huang (2012) argued that management theories are unsatisfying to teach in that they seem disconnected from the realities and nuance of organizational life. More generally, Chia and Holt (2008) commented that "a preference for abstract causal explanation over practical knowledge, and for reason and truth over what works, has led to [management researchers] privileging . . . detached contemplation over involved action" (p. 473). Similarly, for Thomas and Wilson (2011), management research has become inward looking, producing theory for theory's sake to boost business schools' rankings and ensure their accreditation but with little concern for improving management practice. Perhaps, however, the problem is even more fundamental. Indeed, according to Kieser and Leiner (2009), the objective of improving practice was always illusory because output from management research is communicated in a way that is not reconcilable with the language of doing. Whatever the case, doubt about the value of theory-driven management research continues to plague scholarly commentary and there is evidence that the negative side (the skeptics) is winning (Joullié & Gould, in press; Kieser et al., 2015).

The purpose of this article is to reveal the nature of management theory and highlight the consequences of its creation. Specifically, in the following pages, it is argued that the academy's lack of practical relevance stems mostly from a desire to explain management and organizational phenomena through exclusively proposing theories about such phenomena. Furthermore, irrespective of their ontological, epistemological, and methodological inclinations or the conceptual approach they follow, an obsession with theory blinds researchers to an insight long established in philosophy of science but not well ensconced within management

literature. In a nutshell, the conundrum is that theory explains in a narrow sense but does not deliver understanding. Such difficulty arises because a scientific explanation is an inference from the general to the particular presented in terms of necessary or probabilistic relationships embedded in a theory, whereas understanding is arrived at through reflection about reasons and values in a way that marginalizes prescribed or probable outcomes. As such, considerations of individuals' freedom, personal responsibility, and objectives are not compatible with scientific explanations. Accordingly, those who conceive of management theory as the sole foundation of management research should not have a monopoly within the academy. Indeed, alternative ways to propose meaningful and practical insights into management phenomena exist, namely, history and "poetry." These approaches, as unorthodox and unsettling as they may seem, are adumbrated and defended in the later part of this article.

The focus of this article is the construct of scientific theory as instantiated in management studies, but not the process of theorizing. That is, this article offers a discussion about the underpinnings and consequences of the meaning of management theory, but not a comparative analysis of the "research paradigms" (or frameworks) that researchers use to produce it (although these latter matters create context for the argument presented and thus are touched upon). Specifically, the thesis starts from the observation that insofar as management research is concerned, two traditions have taken hold (Lincoln et al., 2005; March, 2007, pp. 166, 174–176; Rabetino et al., 2020, pp. 4, 22–24). First, research endeavors informed by positivist and postpositivist epistemologies have become, for the most part, indistinguishable because those working within these frameworks share a desire to propose explanations aimed at prediction and control of the phenomena they analyze. Second, scholars embracing interpretivist, constructivist, and critical studies paradigms have mostly set aside their initial differences and now view themselves as having in common that their mission is to create theories informed by subjective revelation. In the aftermath of such meetings of minds, management research has been mostly conducted either through using positivist (hereafter "traditional") or postmodernist (hereafter "critical") epistemologies, each broadly conceived to embrace minor and nuanced departures from orthodox protocols (Joullié, 2018; Shepherd & Shepherd, 2013).

The conception of theory which is focal in this article is that used within the scholarly frame of reference. As such, the analysis proposed in the following pages is not relevant to the term as it is applied loosely in everyday parlance to refer to conjecture or unsupported speculation. By way of context, this article will not describe or critique the theories that have been advanced in management and organization studies over the last decades (see Rabetino et al., 2020, for a classification of strategic management theories). Moreover, it will not provide commentary concerning the merits of the

kind of data (quantitative or qualitative) and the level of analysis (micro, meso, or meta) used to generate management theories. Rather, for purposes of developing the current thesis and consistent with the view advanced by Hoskisson et al. (1999), it is assumed here that there is no consequential distinction between theory created from reflection on quantitative as opposed to qualitative data. Similarly, micro-, meso-, or meta-level contributions will be classified together as theory. Indeed, it will be argued that even if management theories differ in the nature of the data that support them, the level of analysis that led to their formulation, the conceptual approach along which they were developed, and the type of problems they are meant to address, they share a crucial characteristic. Specifically, theories are so classified because they prescribe, in one way or another, a stable relationship between variables (and thus constructs).

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In science, a law is a generalization that summarizes observations made under experimental, quasi-experimental, or fully natural conditions (Nagel, 1961, pp. 49–52; Thagard, 1992, pp. 225–227). A scientific law only reports on what is observed. For example, it is a law that ice floats on water. The converse (water floats on ice) is conceivable but has not been observed to be the case. In contrast, a scientific theory is an explanation for a law that has been successfully tested using accepted standards and protocols (an untested explanation for a law is hypothesis, conjecture, speculation, or proposition). For instance, Darwin's theory of evolution by means of natural selection is an explanation for the law of evolution as evidenced by the fossil record (and other phenomena). Not all laws have been explained with theories. For example, no theory is available to explain why certain bird species form long-term dyads, whereas most do not, but conjecture exists.

Scientific theories explain all pertinent laws and more specific theories. For example, knowledge of fundamental physical theories affords the scientist a head start when seeking to explain fluid dynamics (Woodward, 2017). Like Russian dolls, scientific explanations are thus inclined to be cascading in nature. In all cases, however, a theory consists of statements about an aspect of the world (the laws subsumed by the theory itself) from which logical consequences derive (Bogen, 2017). These consequences can be necessary, merely probable or even comparative (as in "smoking increases the probability of developing lung cancer"—implicitly offering a comparison with not smoking), but in each case a scientific theory codifies predictive knowledge.[2] In so doing, it allows for a measure of control or, in instances such as meteorology and astronomy, at least permits (probabilistic) prediction of the phenomena that the law describes and the theory explains. Indeed, to resurrect an adage, it is because theory captures predictive knowledge about a feature of reality that "there is nothing so practical as a good theory" (Lewin, 1952, p. 169). It is noteworthy that this predictive feature, at least according to orthodoxy, characterizes both social and natural science theories (Coleman, 2007; Taagepera, 2008).

The characteristic elements of scientific explanation were implicit in sociology and psychology even before philosophers of science attempted to formalize them. For example, Durkheim (1893/2014) sought to explain how societies maintain internal cohesion using such a schema. His theory is that social order arises because of the presence of either of two possible forms of solidarity, namely, mechanical for primitive societies or organic for industrialized ones. In psychology, Freud (1900/2005) proposed a theoretical system to explain adult behavior as an archetypical response caused by subconscious memories of childhood trauma. Later, Skinner (1953/2014), with his conception of operant conditioning, rejected the Freudian account and held that behavior is shaped in the course of interaction with an organism's ambient stimuli. In each of

these disparate cases, the phenomena of analytic interest are explained through proposing a theory. Management theorists have proffered equivalent contributions. An example from this latter domain which adheres to the typical aforementioned semantic structure of scientific explanation is as follows:

> Sales representatives performed well last month because working conditions are adequate and financial incentives were attractive and because, according to Herzberg's two-factor theory (Sachau, 2007), employees go beyond compliance when both "hygiene" (i.e., relating to baseline working conditions) and motivating factors (i.e., relating to commitment, dedication and pursuit of excellence) are in play.

Theory and explanation in management

In management (including strategic management) literature, inquiry into the nature of theory and theory building typically analyzes the epistemological and methodological assumptions that underpin research (Rabetino et al., 2020). Authors who contribute to such discussions reveal how they conceive of the process of management research as it is, or should be, practiced. In other words, those who speculate about management theory formulation propose meta-theoretical views, with an implicit or explicit acknowledgment that one unifying research paradigm does not exist (Calori, 1998). Examples of such management meta-theories abound: Hassard and Cox (2013), Kilduff et al. (2011), Lakomski and Evers (2011), Corley and Gioia (2011), Boisot and McKelvey (2010), Clegg & Ross-Smith (2003), Johnson and Duberley (2000), Deetz (1996), or again Gioia and Pitre (1990).

In management studies, discussion about meta-theory traces its origin to the work of Burrell and Morgan (1979), which heralds the starting point of the "paradigm wars" of the 1980s and 1990s (Bryman, 2008; Shepherd & Shepherd, 2013). In the meta-theoretical battles of this era, protagonists disagreed on the nature of organizational reality and on how best to study that reality. However, in spite of these controversies, a consensus exists among prominent (and to date mainstream) management meta-theorists concerning a central issue: Explanation in management studies follows the causal model of scientific explanation. Indeed, these meta-theorists hold that causal chains are present in organizational reality and a description of their *modus operandi* is a central element of what management theory is about. For instance, Sutton and Staw (1995) wrote, "theory emphasizes the nature of causal relationships, identifying what comes first as well as the timing of such events" (p. 378). Similarly, all four meta-theoretical models identified by Kilduff et al. (2011) "posit causal relationships" (p. 298). Shapira (2011, p. 1313), Davis (2015, p. 183), Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan (2007, p. 1281), Van de Ven and Johnson (2006, p. 806), and again Whetten (1989, p. 491) are broadly in agreement, each asserting or arguing in their own way that the objective of theoretical knowledge in management studies is the identification of causal chains to

formulate predictions (the position of non-mainstream meta-theorists is discussed later).[3]

In sum, for mainstream meta-theorists, management theories are statements that disclose an aspect of organizational reality, the knowledge of which enables prediction and possibly control of future work–related events through positing causal interactions, relationships, processes, or structures. While management meta-theorists have challenged Burrell and Morgan's (1979) analysis of sociological research and disagreed about which paradigm is best suited for management research, the embrace of the causal model of scientific explanation in mainstream management studies has remained largely uncontested.

Explaining management laws

The world of managers and the resources they oversee offers an abundance of laws (in the descriptive sense of observed regularities). For instance, most employees arrive to and leave from a place of engagement at set times. When called to meetings, they typically attend them. Beyond such basic regularities, some employees consistently exceed compliance-related expectations. Managers are inclined to reward such conscientious workers and discipline or otherwise admonish their peers who, often in a somewhat relative sense, are identified as underperforming. Customers satisfied with the offerings provided by a firm tend to do repeat business with that entity. Moreover, they may recommend it. Executives generally look for and discuss opportunities to increase return on capital deployed under their stewardship. Behavioral laws of such kind are pervasive in the world of commerce and within workplaces. As noted, mainstream management and organizational researchers attempt to account for them by way of theories.

The domination of causal theory production in management research has an illustrious history that commenced (at least in the modern era) with the archetypal scientific theoretician, Frederick Taylor. Indeed, in insisting (and providing formulaic rationale) that there is "one best way" to do production-related tasks, the pioneering management scientist was advancing a theory of management, in his case of job design. However, despite Taylor's enduring influence, to date no management theory has been advanced that can be implemented with the same reliability as those addressing the physical world's interrelationships. This shortcoming represents something of an elephant in the room for the custodians of management studies. As Barker (2010) notes, the absence of a body of knowledge leading to predictable and reliable results undermines the efforts of commentators who argue that management is a profession.

As a rejoinder to Barker's (2010) criticism, management researchers are justified in replying that the lack of progress in identifying domain-specific theory that can be impressively implemented arises principally because of validation difficulties. Such problems have been comprehensively documented

(e.g., Crowther & Lancaster, 2008; Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Nagel, 1961, pp. 447–502; Starbuck, 2006). One is particularly noteworthy because, although it manifests essentially as a technical matter for those caught up in the machinations of quantitative analysis, it starkly exposes a crucial conceptual distinction between social and natural science. Specifically, unlike events observed in the physical world, organizational phenomena are influenced by an indeterminate number of variables.[4] Constructs of interest to social science researchers, although in principle often amenable to experimental control, are not typically investigated using the same laboratory protocols that are associated with the natural sciences, mostly for practical and ethical reasons. Furthermore, even in the case of field or natural experiments on work-related phenomena, delineating experimental and control groups is frequently not straightforward (Davis, 2015, p. 183).

Techniques exist in social sciences that are intended to compensate for the difficulties associated with being unable to conduct laboratory experiments. Most of these techniques attempt to offset problems arising as a consequence of not having a robust control group. They include manipulations such as statistical control (random sampling being the most widespread instantiation) and use of proto-control groups *à la* field or natural experiments. However, as Andreski (1969) long observed, unambiguous explanations invoking cause–effect relationships are not realistic in domains such as sociology and human-orientated psychology (pp. 47–59). Indeed, within the social sciences, conclusions based on experimentation protocols are beset by the possibility of competing explanation, arising owing to compromise of the principle of laboratory control. A generic case in point concerns the changing intentions of individuals, the behavior of whom is being studied. A manifestation of this problem is the recent "replication crisis," wherein social science (including business studies) researchers have had difficulty reproducing findings of published research (Aguinis et al., 2017; Yong, 2016).

In summary, the main difficulties that management researchers face in conducting their studies, formulating their theories, and validating their results stem from a common origin. Specifically, malaise emerges from a desire to account for observed organizational regularities (laws) as natural scientists do, by way of necessary (typically causal) mechanisms: theory. However, looking for deterministic accounts of human interaction de facto assumes that these accounts exist. It is thus unsurprising that some scholars have taken issue with such an approach.

Challenges to theory and scientific explanation

Natural and social science

Scholarly interest in scientific explanation is understandable in light of 19th- and early 20th-century scientists' purported

ability to explain all phenomena, including psychological and social ones (Gould et al., 2017; Salmon, 2006, pp. 11–25). Not everyone was so easily convinced, however. For example, German sociologist and psychologist Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) held that science would not account for the totality of human experience. Indeed, Dilthey (1883/1989, p. 58) pressed that whereas nature is characterized by "objective necessity" and causal continuity, "man finds within his self-consciousness a sovereignty of the will, a responsibility for actions, a capacity for subjecting everything to thought and for resisting from within the stronghold of his personal freedom any and every encroachment." While "all science is experiential," the "facts of consciousness" (Dilthey, 1883/1989, p. 50) such as willing, feeling, and thinking are not knowable through means of natural science. These phenomena have a different epistemological status because they are only accessible through reflective analysis, introspection, and exegesis of the records of human existence. In his late works, Dilthey (1900/1996) clubbed such methodological orientations under the umbrella term "hermeneutics."

The difficulty inherent in studying human inner life generally and consciousness particularly through the same means that scientists use to study nature led Dilthey (1883/1989) to distinguish between *Naturwissenschaften* (the natural sciences) and *Geisteswissenschaften* (literally, the sciences of the mind or spirit), generally translated in English as the human or social sciences. In Dilthey's view, the task of natural science is to propose cause-and-effect-based explanations of phenomena. As the notion of causality renders the construct of "choice" meaningless, such a kind of explanation is acceptable within natural sciences where researchers inquire into behavior that is amoral in nature and not associated with human-type agency. By contrast, the mission of the social sciences is understanding lived experience. For Dilthey (1883/1989), this undertaking entails identifying and articulating aspects of social and cultural life that highlight intrinsic reasons for, and provide meaning to, human action and relationships (pp. 72–79). In Dilthey's conceptualization, understanding requires an analysis of the ideals, values, and norms that manifest in human choice. Such an approach marginalizes deterministic interactions and prescribed outcomes, which are what theories embed.

It is noteworthy that Dilthey (1883/1989, pp. 393–399; 1900/1996, pp. 263–266) did not deny the existence of structures governing human thought and socio-historical reality, phenomena that he sometimes referred to as "forces" or "laws." For Dilthey, however, such structures do not determine human behavior. In his view, social scientists are less concerned with what people do individually or collectively, but more with what they should do. If individuals exhibit behavioral continuity, if they behave in regular and even predictable ways, it is because they have ultimately chosen to do so. Hence, the structures uncovered by the

social scientist govern human reality only insofar as they are normative. Behavioral patterns emerge exclusively because humans, as an act of volition, conform to precedents that they have established for themselves purposefully, for idiosyncratic reasons or because they seek to comply with group norms. Human action therefore cannot be reconciled with cause-and-effect-type logic but rather is the product of choice, mostly made in constrained circumstances (Dilthey, 1883/1989, pp. 453–455).

Dilthey's analysis of natural and social science has been influential (Cohen, 1994, pp. xxxi–xxxii). For example, his dichotomy between scientific explanation and understanding was not lost on Max Weber (1920/2012), who tried to combine both approaches when developing interpretive sociology (Giddens, 1982; Khurana, 2007, pp. 394–395). For Weber, the interpretive sociologist's job is to reconstruct the meaning of social events from the perspective of those who live them, rather than exclusively through the detached and objective standpoint of the natural scientist (in organization studies, this reconstructive stance has notably been adopted in Weick, 1995). That is, the Weberian sociologist is to account for the actions of other human beings not as manifesting impersonal causal processes but by attributing to them the feelings and thoughts which he would have if he carried out the same actions. However, Weber acknowledged the merit of scientific explanation where social and historical phenomena have no known origin or when actions have unintended consequences. As he put it, in these circumstances, "the interpretive understanding of social action" is to arrive "at a causal explanation of its course and effects" (Weber, 1920/2012, p. 88).

Critical theory

Dilthey's contention that human endeavor and relationships should be received in light of their social and historical context is also noticeable in Horkheimer's (1937/2002, pp. 10–17) work and in particular his critique of theory. For Horkheimer (1937/2002), theory as it is understood in natural science ("traditional theory" in his parlance) follows unificationist logic (pp. 188–190). Indeed, in Horkheimer's view, theory consists in propositions about a subject of inquiry from which predictions derive. To the extent that such predictions are compatible with facts, theory is validated. Furthermore, the "smaller the number of primary principles in comparison with the derivations, the more perfect the theory" (Horkheimer, 1937/2002, p. 188).

While recognizing the merit and successes of natural science, Horkheimer (1937/2002) argued that its underlying conception of theory is inadequate and in fact counterproductive in social science (pp. 190–196). This inadequacy arises because, for Horkheimer (1937/2002), traditional theorists deliberately study reality only as it is given in experience, in isolation from broader moral, social, or

historical considerations (pp. 133–134). Thus, even when they are social scientists, traditional theorists do not appreciate that their work is morally, socially, and historically contingent. In this sense, the knowledge they produce is not only superficial but also incomplete. Indeed, because they ignore their work's social (moral and historical) underpinnings, traditional social scientists are ignorant of its social (moral and historical) consequences.

Oblivious to their work's historical, social, and moral context, traditional theorists do not recognize that the problems they address have only come to be identified as such in particular circumstances. In other words, traditional scientists do not realize that they work only insofar as society legitimates their professional activity. It follows that traditional theory, by way of the scientific knowledge it produces and despite claims of neutrality and objectivity, supports rather than challenges the established social order. Moreover, since the triumph of the Enlightenment, that social order is for Horkheimer (1937/2002) quintessentially bourgeois: It oppresses the laboring masses to the benefit of a capitalist elite and certain of its more privileged servants (pp. 197–207). Willingly or not, knowingly or not, traditional scientists, including social scientists, belong to the latter of these categories.

Horkheimer (1937/2002) insisted that the purpose of social science is to remake society as more humane and just (pp. 208–210). To achieve such an objective, that is, to liberate the masses from bourgeois oppression and capitalist exploitation, he averred that a new kind of theory is required in social science: critical theory. Critical theorists differ from traditional theorists (Horkheimer, 1937/2002) in their conviction that social reality is not a given but the product of human activity and interpersonal relationships (pp. 210–215). They approach their subject matter with an underlying motive: to expose the subordination of traditional science to bourgeois society. Indeed, unlike traditional theory, critical theory does not pretend to be neutral or objective. The critical theorist is aware of his own partiality and superordinate objective of changing history through a process of critique. Such a stance does not imply superficiality or one-sidedness; on the contrary and again in contrast to traditional theory, Horkheimer (1937/2002) maintained that critical theory reconciles subject with object or man with society to produce humane knowledge as opposed to knowledge *per se* (pp. 236–243).[5] Irrespective of their merits (some of which are examined later), Horkheimer's arguments have had a distinguished legacy in social science (Berendzen, 2017), including organization studies (Steffy & Grimes, 1986). In management studies, their influence is most visible in the work of critical management studies scholars.

Although mostly associated with the seminal collection of essays edited by Alvesson and Willmott (1992), the research agenda of critical management studies has splintered into several lines of inquiry (Adler et al., 2007;

Fournier & Grey, 2000). Notwithstanding this splintering, with varying emphases, critical management authors typically consider that individuals in general and employees in particular are prevented from attaining their full potential by social and bureaucratic structures. Such constraining elements are found, for example, in government agencies and the private sector, including hospitals, prisons, universities, and corporations. Institutions of these kinds are thus perceived of as vehicles of mass oppression operating under the guise of welfare provision, health preservation, crime prevention, higher education dispensation, and economic development. Business schools are notoriously at the receiving end of this indictment in that they are charged to purvey corporate interests, managerialist assumptions, and neoliberal ideologies under the guise of common economic sense and good managerial practice (Alvesson & Willmott, 2003; Bowden, 2018, pp. 208–235; Grey & Willmott, 2005).

For critical management studies scholars, not only is knowledge power, but also, as Foucault (1995) pointed out, power itself is knowledge because it supports mainly the production of the kind of expertise that consolidates social control. Such a view renders logic, rationality, and the scientific enterprise suspect, in that it posits that oppression underlies the production of conclusions purported to be universal, ahistorical, and unquestionable. The objectivity claimed by scientific research (particularly when undertaken in the social sciences) is therefore revealed as a delusion, exposed as such through a rigorous hermeneutics of suspicion. Of more pragmatic concern, the research conclusions of scientists are better thought of as ideologically driven distortions of reality serving institutional interests. However, emancipation, although difficult, remains possible. It requires analysis of social structures and managerial as well as scientific discourse which explicitly exposes oppressive agendas (Fournier & Grey, 2000; Grey & Willmott, 2005). Or so it seems.

Theory and critical management studies

The research agenda of critical management scholars is potentially seductive for researchers wary of mainstream research. Indeed, it is a small step from believing that traditional (theory-driven) management research rests on and conveys a socially harmful ideology to believing that the two central pillars of scientific research that theory embeds (objective observation and ensuing logical reasoning) should be abandoned. However, a closer inspection of critical management authors' assumptions and objectives reveals that the kind of research they advocate cannot in fact make good on its stated promise. This inability arises from weaknesses inherent in critical theory, exacerbated when such theory is being applied by critical management advocates.

The current authors will not question whether Horkheimer's confidence that adopting critical theory will help deliver a more just and humane society is reasonable (or even whether

Horkheimer's envisioned society really is more just and humane). More relevant to this article is to evaluate the degree to which critical theory differs from the general construct of theory described earlier, that which Horkheimer labeled "traditional." Perhaps surprisingly, scrutiny of Horkheimer's arguments reveals that critical theory, as the name in fact plainly suggests, is still theory. Indeed, if critical theory differs from traditional theory for being historically situated and directed to a particular social end, it shares with traditional theory crucial characteristics. Specifically, critical theory (like some traditional theory) uses unificationist logic ostensibly to provide explanatory knowledge through embrace of the same language forms (in particular its semantic structure) when offering predictions.

Critical theory follows unificationist logic because it rests on a general explanatory principle. This general principle is apparent in Horkheimer's (1937/2002) view that "the discrepancy between fact and theory [must be overcome because behind them] lies a deeper unity, namely the general subjectivity upon which individual knowledge depends" (p. 203). From this "deeper unity" or ultimate explanatory relationship derives Horkheimer's general contention that traditional theoretical knowledge is not objective but rather is contingent on historical and social events and his more specific view that traditional theory serves the interests of bourgeois society.

Horkheimer (1937/2002) acknowledged that social science based on traditional theory delivers knowledge of society and, as such, is sometimes useful (p. 197). For example, in the arena of management studies and industrial sociology, social science as traditionally conceived has revealed that division of labor improves productive efficiency in factory contexts (Horkheimer, 1937/2002, p. 216). He (Horkheimer, 1937/2002) insisted, however, that traditional social science is flawed in that its methods do not recognize that "reality is itself the product of a society's work" (p. 203). As such, knowledge derived from traditional theory contributes to maintaining existing hierarchical power structures in general and exploitation of the masses by the capitalist elite in particular. By contrast, the objective of critical theory is to deliver knowledge that will drive societal change. Whatever the case, it is noteworthy that explanatory knowledge of society is an objective pursued by both critical and traditional theory.

In summary, as Horkheimer (1937/2002) himself admitted, if the works of the traditional and critical theorists differ in their specific interests, they "manifest the same logical form" (p. 216). Indeed, from the perspective of unificationist logic, they are indistinguishable. In other words, management scholars looking for an alternative to (traditional) theory, its particular mode of scientific explanation and its accompanying deterministic portrayal of human agency will not find solace in Horkheimer's critical theory, irrespective of the merit of the research program

such theory makes possible. Similarly, the work of critical management scholars offers little to the management researcher wary of the limitations of scientific explanation. There are two main reasons for such a letdown.

First, critical management authors, despite their wariness of science, still embrace its central objective. As Alvesson and Willmott (2003) wrote in their review of the body of scholarship they initiated, mainstream management research promotes the view that

> knowledge of management [is] knowledge for management, [whereas] critical perspectives on management share the aim of developing a less managerially partisan position. Insights drawn from traditions of critical social science are applied to rethink and develop the theory and practice of management. (p. 1)

What Alvesson and Willmott are saying here is that although the intentions of critical management authors are at odds with those of the orthodox researchers they criticize, critical authors, just as much as traditional ones, pursue professional legitimation through improved managerial practice by way of theory (on this point, see also Spicer et al., 2009, and Adler et al., 2007, p. 2). Understandably so, because adopting a purely critical, non-performative stance would ultimately condemn critical management authors to solipsism and thus irrelevance. As Parker and Parker (2017) noted, in critical management studies, "critique has always been in tension with a desire for influence" (p. 1367). The tension to which they refer was first highlighted by Habermas (1998) with regard to critical theory in general and remains unresolved (pp. 126–130). In fact, it has recently intensified (King & Land, 2018; Parker and Parker, 2017; Spicer et al., 2009, 2016). A more pressing dilemma is that insofar as they embrace pursuit of theory and the legitimation (notably by way of contribution to managerial practice) it affords, critical management authors do not propose a counter-perspective to mainstream management studies.

Second, critical management studies cannot deliver definitive outcomes, be they in the form of emancipation or theory. Indeed, if social structures are by definition alienating as the critical management community purports them to be, then so are critical management studies, because this body of research, with its dedicated journals, conferences, and institutional grants, has created for itself a social structure. Besides, if rationality is misleading as critical management authors propose, then rational arguments (including defense of the proposition that rationality is misleading) lose their potency—or do they? On these matters, critical management advocates appear to lack the reflexivity they trumpet as being one of the strengths of their epistemology (cf. Fournier & Grey, 2000, p. 282).

The aforementioned comments imply that in the absence of knowledge of ultimate truth (or ways to obtain

it), definitive theoretical conclusions or practical courses of action cannot be proposed. Critical management inquiry will only reveal that underneath every alienating institution or managerial layer lies another which is equally estranging. As such, theoretical abyss and practical paralysis, not emancipation, result from critical management research (a sustained discussion on this theme is available in Joullié & Spillane, 2020; see also Bowden, 2018, pp. 250–252 and Donaldson, 2003). In the final analysis, critical management authors play the role of their academic orthodoxy's good conscience. They speak from self-claimed higher moral and epistemological grounds but their embraced epistemology denudes them of the ability to influence orthodox management research and managerial practice.

Implications for management research

In a widely quoted essay, Ghoshal (2005) pressed that management researchers do little else but convey liberalism dressed up as "pretense of knowledge" (p. 77). In Ghoshal's view, such pretense arises because researchers adopt the approach of natural science when they study organizational reality. In so doing, they develop a sort of physics in which "causal and testable theories" (Ghoshal, 2005, p. 86) operate on employees (and others) considered as non-sentient input in the process of productive transformation. Such an impoverished view of organizational reality, insisted Ghoshal (2005, pp. 88–89), is at its core ideological and socially harmful in that it has a tendency to be self-fulfilling.

To move from pretense to substance, Ghoshal (2005) urged management researchers to recognize that no single idea captures social complexity and in particular that human beings do not exclusively pursue personal gain, as alleged in much current management scholarship (pp. 86–87). He further held that management research requires a unifying framework able to accommodate simultaneously different views of human nature. As a first step on the journey toward developing such a framework, Ghoshal (2005, pp. 88–89) called for the embrace of intellectual pluralism in the academy (a call echoed by Morell & Learmonth, 2015). Within such a pluralism, multiple perspectives sit beside each other with equanimity and the currently dominating research framework is downgraded. However, and despite his open-minded inclinations, Ghoshal (2005) did not give up on theory (p. 87). In fact, he encouraged management researchers to produce more of it. He apparently did not appreciate all the implications of this emphasis, one of these being that a single-minded quest for theory puts researchers on the path to natural science and its particular mode of explanation.

Management researchers seeking a substitute to their theory-driven orthodoxy but suspicious of critical management studies have refuge in at least one alternative. Indeed,

they need only return to Dilthey's core arguments. Specifically, rather than looking for scientific explanation for management laws, scholars have the option to attempt to understand such phenomena. That is, if researchers want to account for the regularities they observe within workplaces, then theory production is not an optimal strategy because, as explained, the accounts that theory generates leave little scope for, or at least marginalize, the roles played by reason, choice, and values.

Since antiquity, humans have developed pictures of themselves in which they choose and consequently attract merit or blame for their actions. In particular, people have expended energy in maintaining systems of thought, like religion, to guide them in making sense of their existence. Modern justice systems also assume, as their most elementary characteristic, that individuals are responsible for their actions, insofar as they understood and could have reasonably predicted those actions' consequences before undertaking them. It is also noteworthy that at least insofar as U.S. Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects (the so-called "Common Rule"; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019) is concerned, human subjects should be dealt with by researchers as autonomous and responsible (i.e., freely choosing) individuals.

A defining feature of human societies is that they assume that behavior is chosen and as such attracts responsibility. On this basis, rather than trying to discover causal relationships underlying the phenomena they observe, management researchers have the option to understand and explain deliberate actions, situational choices, ambiguities, and constraints. If they take this latter path, scholars would study why managers have made the decisions they have, but, crucially, embed such analyses in a context of reasons, values, biases, and idiosyncrasies. So-inclined researchers would stop acting as natural scientists and abandon the claim to predictive knowledge. Rather, they would conduct themselves as historians because their analyses will be after-the-fact reconstructions of events, situations, decisions, and intentions. As far as the business and activities of humans are concerned, the past helps understand the present and this understanding is the principal guide for future actions. As Dilthey (1900/1996) pressed, in the social sciences, historical experience and its retrospective analysis, not controlled experiments, are the main source of knowledge. The existence of such publications as *Business History* and the *Journal of Management History* and the inclusion of history in organization studies, pioneered by Kieser (1994) and to which the *Academy of Management Review* dedicated a special issue (Godfrey et al., 2016), rest on this contention, broadly understood.

In *Poetics*, Aristotle proposed that metaphor, alliteration, and imagination-fuelled speculation are superior to history because the former techniques invoke the universal and as such embrace that which could be true, whereas the latter merely records the particular, what is true. If

Aristotle's insight is accepted, then, to complement their historical analyses, management scholars looking for an alternative to theory-driven research should engage, for lack of a better word, in "poetry." That is, rather than trying to identify predictive theories leading to certain results, management authors should start from the premise that human agency is not constrained in a deterministic sense and that the future is thus best conceived of as a smorgasbord of possible scenarios. Such scholars would explore what could have happened if different values had been held, other objectives pursued, other ambiguities faced, other language used, other emotions felt, other problems resolved, and other decisions made. Although not in these words, this view of organizational research as "social poetics" or as "situational dialogical action research" has been notably defended by Schön (1983), Cunliffe (2002), and Shotter (2010).

Readers smiling at the idea that management scholarship should be a form of "poetry" should pause and recognize that even in organizational contexts, ambiguity is the norm and decisions have always an emotional dimension. Furthermore, if they want to guide managers in replicating the successes of Apple's Steve Jobs or Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, management scholars cannot only be scientists and content themselves with understanding the world as it is or seek to identify "best practice," the replication of which may buy time but spells extinction when (not if) market conditions change. Rather, they need also to emphasize their imagination. Indeed, focusing on what there is, as theorists do, comes at the expense of missing out on what there is not yet, on what there could be. Management scholars have thus the choice of proposing new ideas, keeping in mind that if they want to help practitioners make sense of the present and its ambiguities, they will seek to reconcile the empirical with the imaginative, the rational with the emotional, and the technical with the moral. This coming to terms with the necessary and the possible is not a scientific endeavor; it has been variously called "good judgement" (Tichy & Bennis, 2007; Vickers, 1983), "practical intelligence" (Sternberg, 2000), or again (after Aristotelian phronesis) "phronetic leadership" (Shotter & Tsoukas, 2014; see also Antonacopoulou, 2010).

The body of knowledge that will emerge from management history and "poetry" will not qualify as a science with its scaffolding of predictive theories buttressed by causal mechanisms. Rather, it will consist of a repository of actual and potential management practices underpinned by psychological and moral stances. However, such a reconceived management scholarship will remain faithful to the requirement to generate practically relevant knowledge. It will achieve it not by claiming it has discovered theories of management, but by educating its students about past managerial decisions grounded in the study of recorded victories, defeats, and missed opportunities. The critical evaluation of the past brings about awareness of alternative futures: Innovation and responsible decision-making have

no other possible foundation. Management scholars convinced by these principles will also remind their students of the fleeting nature of successes and the attractive if elusive character of possibilities. Such a reminder will be a lesson in skepticism and in humility directed to those who aspire to business leadership—one that can do no harm.

Conclusion

Management research is predicated on the assumption that there exists within workplaces and their environment phenomena (concerning structures, forms, processes, capabilities, and practices) that are stable enough to be discovered, analyzed, and formalized. Researchers are expected to reveal and codify such a body of knowledge, educators to teach it, and managers to apply it. Commencing with Taylor and his ilk, the building block of this corpus has been, or at least has been alleged to be, management theory.

In science, laws summarize observations and theories explain laws. More precisely, scientific theories formalize, by way of statements from which logical consequences derive, the processes or structures that operate within reality as described by laws. Knowledge of theory allows for prediction and possibly control of the phenomena that the theory explains and that the law summarizes. These elements characterize conventional models of scientific explanation.

For decades, it has been standard practice that researchers seeking to be published in leading management journals make a theoretical contribution. In support of this agenda, meta-theorists have debated ways to conduct the sort of research that produces management theory. In so doing, they have missed opportunities to critique prevailing orthodoxy. However, over the same period, there have been detractors who have pointed out in increasingly strident terms that management research has limited practical relevance (e.g., Joullié & Gould, in press). As with meta-theorizing, however, the view that the *raison d'être* of management research is to produce theory has remained unchallenged. Even critical management authors, who aspire to disrupt orthodox research and remedy its purported alienating effects, have espoused its agenda insofar as they have sought to contribute to theory. Thus, for all involved, be they traditional or critical management scholars, the pursuit of theory has been *the* central preoccupation.

This article has argued that a single-minded quest for management theory does not serve researchers' interests. Indeed, an obsession with theory undermines management as a research field because, in science generally and management studies particularly, appeals to theory involve causes. The language of causality, however, does not accommodate reflection on reasons and objectives. Hence, in conventional parlance, as well as in more technical applications, to be caused to do something is to have no reason to do it, but rather be forced to. Exclusively pursuing theory production in management studies requires that the world of managers and workplaces is reconcilable with

natural science and describable using a deterministic language of forces, stimuli, reactions, pressures, causes, and effects. However, the language of natural science cannot give voice to constructs such as morality, imagination, choice, purpose, creativity, freedom, and responsibility, for centuries considered characteristic hallmarks of human agency. In any case, if valid, the view of humanity implied by natural science's vocabulary (i.e., the language used to present a research question and describe a methodology for answering it) applies not only to an established object of study, but also to management researchers themselves, perhaps unbeknownst to them.

In certain respects, work settings are microcosms of human societies. For example, they typically reproduce, in simplified form, the dilemmas that individuals confront in other contexts (Alvesson, 2002). Hence, ontological assumptions in which workplaces are populated with individuals seen as bereft of choice, self-selected purpose and other distinctively human forms of agency represent questionable research foundations. For reasons presented earlier, management theory smuggles in such assumptions. Furthermore, attempting to validate a management theory as part of a research project *de facto* contradicts the basic ethical principles of the Common Rule, as it requires assuming that the individuals, whose behavior is being compared with what the theory predicts, are denuded of autonomy, decision-making capacity, and, ultimately, responsibility. In this respect, techniques resting on a vision of human existence that contradicts how managers and their subordinates understand themselves are destined to be either ignored or, when applied, typically yield underwhelming results. The limited practical relevance of theory-driven management research is a visible manifestation of this problem.

After surveying the difficulties that management researchers were facing three decades ago, Van Maanen (1989) called for a 10-year moratorium on theory generation (p. 32). The current authors go further and challenge management studies' theory-driven research agenda. In so doing, they resurrect Gellner's (1986) argument that if science is characterized by its ability to generate consensual, cumulative knowledge capable of improving human existence by way of predictions, the so-called "social sciences" (to which management studies belong) are not scientific (pp. 126–127). Winch (1958/1990) did not say otherwise when he argued that social science is better approached not as science but as a branch of philosophy. Indeed, according to Winch, explanations of human behavior are not of the same order as (and are not reducible to) the kind of explanations produced by natural scientists.

The expression "physics envy," which captures sarcastically the established central role of theory in management research, should be received, if not as an alarm bell, at least as a wake-up call. Kieser and Leiner (2009) were justified in arguing that the gap between contemporary management research and practice is unbridgeable because the language of management research is at least partly incompatible with that of management practice. Thus, as long as researchers attempt to formulate answers to management problems in the (scientific, deterministic) language of their academy's current orthodoxy, they will fall short on producing practically relevant output.

To the extent that language is the principal means of communication among researchers and between researchers and the individuals the behavior of whom they study, management research has a crucial linguistic component. Critical management authors are thus justified in directing attention to the constraining and possibly alienating role of language. The construct of management theory is here a case in point: Such theory embodies, indeed requires, a deterministic picture of human existence that is typically unacknowledged, presumably because it is unrecognized. In management research as in other aspects of life, words and phraseology convey a vision of human nature and social reality. In this sense, management research requires appreciation of the spectrum of conventional usages of the terms (and their consequences) to which one subjects others and to which one is subjected. Such an observation inspires the researcher to think about the possibilities afforded by history and poetry to the enterprise of inquiry into management and work-related phenomena. Indeed, the observation lays bare several of the unacknowledged flaws of theory (traditional and critical) when applied to management research.

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Notes

1. According to the causal model of explanation and depending on context, it sometimes becomes necessary to make much of the distinction between correlation and causation. When such an emphasis is made, causation is identified as more consequential than correlation, although correlation, like causation, implies a predictive (thus ultimately deterministic) relationship; see Note 2 for further details on this matter. Indeed, this preference forms the substance of the rationale for the laboratory experiment protocol, the idea

being that a laboratory experiment is not necessarily practicable but is more desirable in that it moves the researcher closer to realizing the ideal of science (as per the causal logic view). In adopting this perspective, one commits to conceiving of reality as a large but finite set of relationships in which variables and measures index stable patterns between underlying constructs. Seen in this light, the project of science is ultimately to reduce the proportion of these relationships that are understood to be correlational in favor of causal relationships (on this theme, see Lecuyer, 1994; see also Gould & Joullié, 2017). The convergence with the unificationist view of science is here again apparent.

2. A probabilistic perspective entails determinism, if at a higher order. Indeed, in a probabilistic account, if the consequences of an event are merely probable, their respective probabilities are themselves determined (Hájek, 2019).

3. Some authors (Mouzelis, 1995; Nadel, 1962) have sought to delineate (social science) theories from meta-theories. In their view, a theory in social science is a statement about the social world that can be empirically tested, whereas a meta-theory is a conceptual tool or paradigm facilitating the elaboration of theories. Such a distinction is partly artificial. Indeed, meta-theories remain theories. They convey testable information about objects of analytic study (theories in this case) insofar as they classify them into categories. Furthermore, social science meta-theories are predictive insofar as they set out the bases upon which theories are to be elaborated. Accordingly, a future or existing but as-yet unknown theory not respecting the categories defined by the relevant meta-theory will not count as a theory.

4. To illustrate this point, consider statistical regression *à la* the general linear model. This protocol produces a best-fit regression line using the least squares function. Setting aside issues of sample size and representativeness, to the extent that such a procedure yields an R-value with an absolute magnitude less than 1, the model is not perfect and the value itself (sometimes accompanied by a graphic depiction) is a mirrored representation of a residual or error term. However, as essentially human-made representations, regression equations have a finite number of terms as their predictors. The implication of this finitude differs between the natural and social sciences. Specifically, in the natural sciences, predictor finitude typically constitutes no conceptual concern in and of itself. Indeed, in natural science, when a phenomenon has been well explored, residuals usually default to being indices of the unreliability of measures. As such, models themselves are complete or near complete and prediction frequently approaches perfection. By contrast, in the social sciences, there is an additional source of error: failure to identify all consequential independent variables. In these latter cases, Occam's parsimony principle is invoked in a highly particularized way, to denote a trade-off between number of illuminating constructs and the size of an error term (or its converse R-value). Hence, in social as opposed to natural science, theorists do not produce models that account for all, or even most, variance on a dependent variable (criterion), so they produce "acceptable" ones, that is, ones that result in a "good" R-value without using "too many" independent variables (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2013, Chapter 5).

5. Although more developed than those on Weber, the point of these comments is not to summarize Horkheimer's life

work, let alone the sociology of the Frankfurt School with which Horkheimer is associated, but only to highlight his understanding and use of the construct of theory, "traditional" and "critical."

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"Physics envy" in organisation studies: the case of James G. March

Physics envy

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Abstract

Purpose – This article aims to propose a critical review of James G. March's research in and particular its consistency with its epistemological and psychological underpinnings.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper proposes a textual and conceptual analysis of James G. March's study.

Findings – The article argues first that March's study exemplifies the "physics envy" typical of management and organisation studies scholars since the early 1960s. Second, evidence is presented that March's conclusions, irrespective of their legacy on management and organisation studies, were not developed along and were not consistent with the foundations that March espoused and advocated during most of his career. As a result, the implications of his conclusions are uncertain. To his credit, however, there are reasons to believe that, towards the end of his career, March came to recognise the limitations of his scholarship. Further, he indicated an alternative avenue for organisation studies which eschews the shortcomings of positivist and post-modern research.

Research limitations/implications – Although centred on March's work, the argument presented is relevant to psychology, organisations, choice, the nature of knowledge, the limitations of positivism and post-modernism.

Originality/value – The paper balances the perspective offered by recent celebratory reviews of March's study.

Keywords Philosophy, Positivism, Behaviourism, Physics envy

Paper type General review

Introduction

James G. March's reputation within organisation studies is impressive. His work on organisation theory, his study of organisational decision-making and his behavioural theory of the firm (to name but a few of his contributions) have sparked developments in organisational learning, strategic management, change management and, to a lesser degree, microeconomics. Overall, March (working alone or in collaboration with noted scholars like Herbert A. Simon) is praised for bringing scientific rigour to organisations studies, especially where the discipline borrows from psychology. His fame is such that special issues, dedicated to his work, have appeared in leading journals such as the *Journal of Management Studies, Organization Science* and, more recently, the *Journal of Management History.*

The objective of this article is to balance the perspective offered by the celebratory contributions and propose a critical review of March's scholarship. The focus here is on the consistency of that scholarship with its stated and unstated assumptions. Concisely, the argument is first that March's work rests on positivist and behaviourist foundations and

exemplifies the "physics envy" from which most of his peers have suffered since the early 1960s. Secondly, evidence is presented that March's writings, irrespective of their legacy and influence on management and organisation studies, cannot be reconciled with their epistemological and psychological underpinnings.

After short primers on logical positivism and behaviourism, this article makes the case that March's work is implicitly built on a logical positivist conception of science and explicitly on a behaviourist approach to psychology. A critical evaluation of March's work is then proposed, examining his conceptions of employees and organisations and the way he formulated his theories and conclusions. The conclusion adumbrates implications for organisation studies, taking account of the conundrum that critical management scholars face in their research agenda, even after acknowledging the shortcomings of March's scholarship.

As the focus of this article is on the internal consistency of March's work, no summary of his main theses is offered. Rather, only those aspects of March's scholarship which pertain to their underpinnings are analysed. Readers interested in learning more about March's ideas are referred to contributions dedicated to such an endeavour, for instance, Badham (2021), Schachter (2021) and the special issues introduced by Levinthal and Marengo (2020) or Bromiley *et al.* (2019). Naturally, readers are also directed to the primary sources (March's books and articles) although, or so this article argues, extracting definitive meaning from them is a challenging undertaking.

Works for which March is remembered today were often co-authored, notably with Cyert, Lave and Simon. Although disagreements between co-authors are not rare, the possibility that March did not share all the views of his co-authors has been ignored here. In other words, the view retained is that in publishing works under his name, March endorsed the contents of these publications without reservation. No other option is scholarly tenable, because March left no statement in his books and articles about his agreement or disagreement with his co-authors.

Central tenets of logical positivism and behaviourism
Logical positivism
Logical positivism (also known as logical empiricism or neopositivism) is the name of a philosophy of science which flourished in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s and in the USA in the 1940s and 1950s. Logical positivists sought to improve on Auguste Comte's "classical" positivism by defining a language that would unify the sciences, clarify the respective roles of science and philosophy, and advance a rule for deciding which propositions are meaningful (Kolakowski, 1969). Although no longer an active area of philosophical scholarship, logical positivism still casts a long shadow over the natural and social sciences (Stroll and Donnellan, 2016).

What notably differentiates logical positivism from other philosophies of knowledge, such as rationalism, is its conception of science. For logical positivists, scientific investigations progress via a general hypothetico-deductive method, according to which theories (hypothesised generalities) are based on inductive inferences from observation statements derived from sense data. These theories produce, by deduction, testable predictions which are confronted with new observations, ideally by way of experimentation. As in physics (logical positivists' exemplary science), scientific theories are sometimes approximate, but they are not uncertain. That is, logical positivists consider that once theories have successfully passed the prediction-verification test, they capture everything that is known about the phenomena they describe. Although disagreeing on the consequences of such principles, logical positivists insist that the claims of all the sciences

be publicly testable in a common language relying on concrete terms (Creath, 2020). This agreement does not emerge from a materialist thesis. Rather, it is a linguistic requirement, stemming from the consensus amongst logical positivists that the language of science is nominalist and phenomenalist, that is, it refers only to tangible, observable entities and phenomena, irrespective of their ultimate ontological makeup (Kolakowski, 1969).

Logical positivists accept the conclusions of Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell in language and symbolic logic that the young Ludwig Wittgenstein exposed in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (published in 1921). Logic and mathematics are concerned with analytic statements (assertions that are necessarily true owing to the meaning of the terms that compose them); science is concerned with synthetic statements (reports on experience or predictions that are either true or false), based on observation or deductively arrived from theories, themselves based on inductive inferences from observation. Statements that are neither analytic nor synthetic, such as moral norms or value judgements, expressions of desire, oxymora, incomplete or grammatically incoherent propositions are dismissed because their truth status cannot be ascertained: they are neither true nor false and are, therefore, (with both a literal and derogatory insinuation) nonsense. In other words, for logical positivists, to be meaningful, statements must express a logical truth, have an empirical referent or combine both features. This typology, known as the analytic-synthetic distinction, captures the essence of logical positivism's conception of the scientific method as built on two pillars, namely, logic and experience (Ayer, 1971). For the sake of simplification, in the remainder of this article, "logical positivism" is often shorted to "positivism"; of Comte's "classical" version of the philosophy of science, there is no further mention.

Today, positivism's epistemology is generally taken for granted (to the point that it is typically unacknowledged), especially in the natural sciences. When applied to management and organisation studies, positivism's agenda is attractive. Indeed, it implies that management research is an endeavour aimed at discovering management theories, according to which firms operate. Further, knowledge of these theories enables scholars and managers to structure work organisations and control (or at least predict) their behaviour in the same way that engineers build bridges or doctors administrate medicine. This set of conceptions is in the main a legacy of the Ford Foundation 1959 report, itself coming in the wake of the success of the behavioural sciences since 1950 and which the work of Herbert A. Simon at the Graduate School of Industrial Administration exemplified with growing fame (Khurana and Spender, 2012; Thomas and Wilson, 2011; Nodoushani, 2000).

Herbert Simon is perhaps the best known of those authors who not only embraced but also promoted logical positivism as an appropriate epistemology to conduct research in management and organisation studies. For example, after acknowledging positivism's influence on his thinking, Simon (1997, pp. 55–57) insisted that the development of a science of administration requires a value-free language to describe organisational phenomena. More recently, Rousseau and McCarthy (2007) argued that good management scholarship and practice start from facts, proceed inductively and incorporate the most recent scientific findings. Such a view is not limited to advocates of evidence-based management scholars such as Rousseau and McCarthy. Indeed, it is embraced, explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, by most management and organisation scholars and attests to positivism's arch-dominance of the discipline (Joullié and Gould, 2021; Joullié and Spillane, 2021; Johnson and Duberley, 2000).

Problems associated with positivism as a philosophy of science have been extensively documented (Popper, 2002), but an exploration of these matters expands beyond the scope of the present argument. Difficulties concerning the application of positivism's epistemology to management research have also been extensively discussed (Joullié and Spillane, 2021,

pp. 122–130; Johnson and Duberley, 2000, pp. 11–61; Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Amongst these difficulties is the requirement that researchers provide unambiguous definitions of the phenomena they set out to study. These definitions are crucial for they determine what researchers observe and what they do not, the ambit of the theories they infer inductively from their observations and the ways in which their theories can be tested.

Behaviourism

To the extent that it can be considered a unified movement, behaviourism is an approach to psychology which emphasises the external, observable aspects of human life and dismisses appeals to (unobservable) mental processes as causes of behaviour [1]. Although some of its conceptual roots date back to physiologist Ivan Pavlov's study of the salivation of dogs, behaviourism as a distinct branch of psychology is largely the creation of John B. Watson, who coined the name. In his manifesto, Watson (1913) urged psychologists to abandon introspection as a scientific method and consciousness as a subject of investigation and study instead what they can observe and measure, namely, behaviour. For Watson, psychology is an objective natural science, the goal of which is the prediction and control of behaviour through the application of causal principles inferred from experimental observation (i.e. scientific theories). This approach to human existence leaves no room for deliberation, intention, rationality or cognitive intelligence. As Watson (1913, p. 158) put it, "the behaviourist, in his efforts to get a unitary scheme of animal response, recognizes no dividing line between man and brute."

Although his methodology landed him firmly in the behaviourist camp, Edward C. Tolman (1932) sought to preserve the notions of "action" and "cognition" in developing a "purposive behaviourism". On his view, the ability of laboratory rats to solve problems and learn mazes was somehow stored in their genetic material, and thus passed from one generation to the next. This approach led Tolman to regard animals' and human beings' intentionality (which he took as an undeniable fact) as originating from their biology. For example, Tolman postulated the existence of biological "cognitive maps", which in his view allow rats and people to navigate their environment purposefully. Further, Tolman (1938) argued that a rat's choice to go right or left in a maze is (causally) determined by environmental variables. As his use of the term "choice" shows, Tolman was undaunted by the tension between self- and external-determination. If he is now hailed as a precursor of behavioural genetics, his attempts to reconcile freedom of the will with physiology did not prove popular with his scientifically orientated peers. Indeed, attributing teleology (thus ultimately, for instance by way of "intelligent design", a divine or at least supernatural quality) to non-thinking organic material is bound to attract vigorous criticism (Spillane and Martin, 2018, pp. 141–142).

B.F. Skinner (2014 [1953]) pushed Watson's recommendations further. He abolished all references to psychological, neurological or physiological concepts, arguing (like Watson before him) that they point to unobservable, therefore, scientifically irrelevant, inner causes. In Skinner's view, behaviour is a reflex and conditioned reflex, that is, innate or a response to (that is, caused by) past and present stimuli. In his words (Skinner, 2014, p. 6): "If we are to use the methods of science in the field of human affairs, we must assume that behavior is lawful and determined." Afterwards, in the same work, Skinner insisted (2014, p. 446): "The hypothesis that man is not free is essential to the application of scientific method to the study of human behavior." On Skinner's view, what appears as (willed) action is in fact reaction because, when stimulated, the body moves automatically, irrationally and irresponsibly, as a biological robot would. Choice, reward, intentions and freedom of the will are illusions, to be recognised as such and banned from scientific psychological language. A

human being is a machine, complex perhaps, but that is not a defeating finding: "Human behavior is at least as difficult a subject matter as the chemistry of organic materials or the structure of the atom. [. . .] If we are to further our understanding of human behavior and to improve our practices of control, we must be prepared for the kind of rigorous thinking which science requires" (Skinner, 2014, p. 42).

Faithful to the conclusions of Pavlov's study of salivating dogs, behaviourists from Watson to Skinner thus consider, with varying emphasis, people as reactive organisms, predictably because uncontrollably, responding to stimuli. Under a behaviourist's pen, the expression "human nature" is understood literally; the construct underpins complex mathematical equations purporting to capture and predict animal or human behaviour. Hence, for behaviourists, the language of mathematics and natural science is applicable to people but that of inner experience, self-consciousness and ethics (e.g. propositions relying on such constructs as "I", self, choice, rewards, objectives, reasons, good and evil) is not. In other words, behaviourism is psychology approached from the perspective of the scientist, like the physicist, who is only interested in the (organic) matter in motion. As such, if by "person" is meant "an individual endowed with a degree of rationality and capable of choice", persons are non-persons for behaviourists, mere vehicles of their genes. Lest readers think that such an analysis is a strawman view of behaviourism. Indeed, Skinner (1983, pp. 412–413), in his autobiography, reflected: "If I am right about human behavior, I have written the autobiography of a nonperson. [. . .] . If I am right about human behavior, an individual is only the way in which a species and a culture produce more of species and culture."

In management and organisation studies, the influence of behaviourist psychology is notably visible in reinforcement motivation theory. Somewhat paradoxically, but in line with behaviourism's proscription of references to unobservable mental entities, reinforcement motivation theory does not hold that (internal) motivation drives behaviour. Rather, for the promoters of the theory, behaviour is motivated (caused) by environmental contingencies (Pinder, 2014, p. 428). Although reinforcement motivation theory is attractive to industrial psychologists promising managers ways to control their employees' workplace performance, it is not invulnerable to ethical and logical criticism (Spillane and Martin, 2018). For example, if employee behaviour is determined by environmental factors, then so is the behaviour of their managers (and that of the industrial psychologists who counsel them), opening thereby an infinite regress and doing away with personal responsibility at work and elsewhere.

The relationship, even the alliance, between logical positivism and behaviourist psychology has long received scholarly attention (Smith, 1986). These debates need not be entered here, but if alliance there is, it is intuitive. For example, logical positivists and behaviourists reject appeals to unobservable constructs (invisible causes for positivists, mental processes for behaviourists) and require empirical data as bases for investigation. Further, logical positivism and behaviourism appeared at about the same time (in the 1920s) and achieved dominance in their respective disciplines in the 1930s and 1940s, periods during which they were presented as revolutionary. Such parallels do not imply that behaviourism is logical positivist psychology or that logical positivism can only conceive of psychology on behaviourist lines. Indeed, early logical positivists such as Frege were keen to dissociate epistemology from psychology and behaviourists like Skinner insisted that their work was free of philosophical preconceptions (Smith, 1986). Besides, whilst logical positivists rely on observation statements derived from sense data, radical behaviourists like Skinner eschew sense data in favour of realism which uses behavioural language. Nevertheless, the affinities between positivism and behaviourism are patent and it is

unsurprising that organisation scholars sought to locate their work under the auspices of both.

March: positivist and behaviourist

As mentioned, Simon (1997) was an avowed (if at times critical) logical positivist. Given the acknowledged, deep and pervasive influence of Simon's work on March's, one could expect that March was equally transparent about the positivist lineage of his thought. However, March did not cite positivism as underpinning his work. For instance, the indexes of *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm* (Cyert and March, 1992), *Organizations* (March and Simon, 1993) and *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences* (Lave and March, 1975) do not list "positivism" as an entry (Simon's *Administrative Behavior* does). Furthermore, neither book proposes a discussion on the philosophy of science generally nor on epistemology specifically. Although the authors (Lave and March, 1975, p. viii) of *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences* introduced their work as "a text [that can be used] in an introductory course in methodology", they (p. 3) held "superfluous" the task of providing a formal definition of a model in social sciences, preferring instead to advance a series of examples. Nevertheless, March's assumption of positivism when stating his methodological premises and intentions is pronounced and pervasive. There are several reasons for holding such a view.

Positivists believe that scientific knowledge starts with phenomena collated as facts, from which theories are inductively inferred. Scientific theories are themselves descriptions of observed patterns, from which predictions can be extracted, to be either verified (or not) by way of new observations. March did not deviate from this general approach. Indeed, words such as "fact", "evidence", "observation", "theory", "prediction", "technology" or "engineering" pepper his works. In the article co-authored with Cohen and Olsen, which describes a "garbage can" model of decision-making (Cohen *et al.*, 1972), the expression "energy load" recurs throughout, indicating the authors' desire to use nominalist language. Similarly, *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm* offers pages containing mathematical equations that would not be out of place in physics or electrical engineering textbooks (see, for example, Cyert and March, 1992, pp. 23–26 and pp. 145–146; see also March and Simon, 1993, pp. 68–69). As March (Lave and March, 1975, p. vii) noted, "A central feature of modern thinking in the social and behavioral sciences is the use of formal models, normally in mathematical form." It is noteworthy that scientists advancing mathematical equations to express theories about the phenomena they study commit themselves, if implicitly, to positivism's epistemology (Berg, 2001, p. 10; Merriam, 1998, p. 4).

In addition to his recurrent use of empiricist language, March embraced the hypothetico-deductive method of positivist science. In an early article on influence, he wrote: "Once answers are provided to [previously stated] questions, it will be possible to proceed to the major task of [...] theory and research: the formulation of a structure of propositions, defining the mechanisms of influence in an empirically-testable form" (March, 1955, p. 451). Such a task is required because, "as a general rule, [developing a theory requires] looking for testable predictions" (Lave and March, 1975, p. 27). True to this principle, in the Postscript to the second edition of *Organizations*, March and Simon (1993, p. 234) insisted that "testing empirically the propositions about organizational behavior that are set forth [in the book]" was of one their constant concerns. Similarly, March elsewhere announced: "The theory of the firm [...] describes how individual business firms make decisions in a market system. [...] the adequacy of the theory is determined by comparing the predictions of the theory with observations on individual firms" (Cyert and March, 1992, p. 177). The priority March assigned to the empirical verification of theories is also visible in his chiding of organisation

theorists for neglecting the "problems of verification" (March and Simon, 1993, pp. 64–66;
see also pp. 51–52).

If March's embrace of positivist epistemology is sustained if unacknowledged, his commitment to behaviourism is equally pervasive but acknowledged. It is, for example, immediately apparent in the title of the book he co-authored with Cyert, *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*, which stresses that the work's focus is what firms (and their member do, irrespective of what they think or say they do. To alleviate any doubt about their preferred psychology, in *Organizations*, March and Simon (1993, p. 28) cited Tolman's (1932) work as underpinning their study. Both authors appear to take Tolman's theories as established beyond question. Indeed, they did not believe it necessary to refer their readers to criticisms that had been by then already levelled at such theories (MacCorquodale and Meehl, 1954), only mentioning works that accept them. March's later publications do not provide evidence that he rejected or even questioned behaviourist premises. The opposite is in fact the case. For example, in the early 1980s, summarising his views on organisational decision-making, March disparaged (*à la* Watson and Skinner) human choice as "faith" (March, 1982, p. 39) and "myth" (March, 1991a, p. 110). Elsewhere, he (March, 1981, p. 568) relied on typical Skinnerian expressions like "positive" and "negative reinforcement."

As noted, the application of positivism and behaviourism to the study of management and organisations is vulnerable to criticism. In adopting the language and scientific method promoted by positivists and in espousing behaviourist lines, March's work is vulnerable to such criticism. Such denunciation is often encapsulated in the expression "physics envy", from which management and organisation scholars are said to suffer (Thomas and Wilson, 2011; Ghoshal, 2005). However, the objective of the following pages is not to identify in March's books and articles the problems his epistemological and psychological underpinnings led him to exemplify. Rather, the objective is to recognise issues that are specific to March's application of these underpinnings and more precisely to highlight problems that stem from March's incomplete attention to the implied strictures. It is worth stressing that not acknowledging the positivist foundations of one's work is no defence against the charge that one misunderstood their implications and associated protocols. Indeed, one cannot claim, even implicitly, the benefits delivered by a philosophy of science without accepting that one's work is assessed against the standards of that same philosophy. This principle applies, to a greater degree, to March's espousal of behaviourist psychology, for in this case the embrace is acknowledged.

March in the positivist and behaviourist mirror
March's employees

In the opening pages of *Organizations*, March and Simon (1993, pp. 7–8) wrote:

> The basic idea that humans make choices and that these choices are informed by assessing alternatives in term of their consequences underlies much of contemporary social science, not to mention 'common sense'. [...] Although those who criticize obsession with rationality will find many more tempting targets than our book, it is probably fair to place it in the 'rational' section of the library. For the most part, we portray behavior as resulting from, and organized around, choices. And we interpret choices as depending on an evaluation of their consequences in term of preferences. In those senses at least, this book is about rationality. [...] The people who inhabit this book are imagined to have reasons for what they do. Those reasons inform both their choices and their justification [...] of their choices. Thus, they provide a basis for predicting both behavior and explanations of behavior. [The book] is built heavily on the assumption that there are consequential reasons for action: that we can predict behavior in and by organizations by assessing the expected subjective value of alternative courses of action. This general frame is used to examine a wide variety of decisions.

March and Simon's opening statement is internally inconsistent. Indeed, there is a contradiction between accepting that human behaviour is structured along choices the consequences of which are rationally evaluated before decisions are made, and wanting to predict that same behaviour (as Watson, Tolman and Skinner tried to do). This contradiction arises from the fact that if reasons justify behaviour, they are not its causes, and thus cannot be used predictively. To have a reason to act in a particular way implies that other actions were possible but not pursued because they were deemed to lead to less desirable outcomes. Conversely, to be caused (forced) to do something means to have no reason for doing it.

In other words, reasons (as March and Simon pointed out) imply objectives, purposes and choices, that is, decision-making. Such implications rule out the possibility of offering precise predictions as demanded by the natural sciences because individuals are free to re-evaluate their objectives and reasons until the time they decide on a particular action, even if no new information has been made available to them. By contrast, as Watson, Tolman and Skinner insisted in their own ways, predictions require stable causal processes that force the entity under analysis to behave in a specified way. This specified way is not an action but a reaction. Actions can be said to be ethical or unethical, reasonable or unreasonable, intelligent (leading to desirable outcomes) or unintelligent, whereas such labelling is irrelevant to reactions. For example, when in good health people move their legs uncontrollably when hit gently on the patella; no moral evaluation can be assigned to that (predictable) physiological reaction. Reactions (and the processes that account for them) are part of the natural order and are what positivist scientists seek to discover and describe by way of theories.

Organisms and objects react to what is done to them and thus escape the attribution of responsibility. By contrast, people choose and act accordingly. As such, they attract judgements of responsibility and accountability. The crucial difference between people and their organism is illustrated by the trivial observation that brains are not put on trial for murder. Only persons are brought to court for an assessment of their reasons, motives and knowledge of circumstantial elements, ultimately to ascertain their degree of responsibility. Blurring the distinction between action and reaction thus amounts to levelling people to their irresponsible reactive organism. As noted, Watson and Skinner did not hesitate openly to obliterate the delineation between persons and their physiological makeup; as for Tolman, his attempts to overcome it through attributing purposiveness to inert genetic material received vigorous rebuttal and has remained without legacy.

March's writings do not make salient the distinction between persons and their organisms and the parallel one between action and reaction. Rather, March typically glossed over these matters. For example, in the "psychological postulates" which "underlie the entire analysis" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 28) developed in *Organizations*, March and Simon explained that human beings are reducible to their organism (specifically the central nervous system). Further, the authors held that human behaviour is analysable in terms of stimuli and stereotyped responses and that analysis can be captured through equations as follows:

> The behavior of an organism through a short interval is to be accounted for by (1) its internal state at the beginning of the interval, and (2) is environment at the beginning of the interval. [...] This is a familiar description of an organism [...] which is compatible with the ordinary mathematical description of dynamic systems" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 28).

Such a characteristically behaviourist objective, grounded on behaviourists tenets, did not prevent March and Simon (1993, p. 30) from summarising their vision of human nature in

ways that contradict (because they call on the construct of choice) both their tenets and objective as follows:

> This, then, is the general picture of the human organism that we will use to analyse organizational behavior. It is a picture of choosing, decision-making, problem-solving organism [...]. We shall see that these particular characteristics of the human organism are basic to some of the salient characteristics of human behavior in organizations.

Tensions between premises and conclusions are not limited to the "psychological postulates" of *Organizations*. Rather, such contradictions are detectable throughout March's body of work. One example is March's (1955) theory of influence. In this contribution, stating first that influence is as essential to understanding decision-making as force is to understanding motion, March (1955, p. 432) proposed, oblivious that causal processes rule out decision-making (choosing): "A definition of influence as a causal relation is formulated. On the basis of this definition, a formal model of a decision-making organism is presented." Muddying the waters further, March (1955, p. 439) also explained that the brain is "a decision-making instrument" without specifying who uses it, the person or its organism. Elsewhere, March (1962) compared business firms to trees and their members to leaves. As justification for these botanical analogies, March (1962, p. 667) held that they allow scholars to advance theories about such notions as "choice" and "goals" because they make predictions about behaviour possible. Like Tolman before him, March, thus believed it was possible to attribute objectives and other teleological features to such organic material as plants.

In summary, March was Janus-faced about the nature of the "people who inhabit" his work. In some pages, these people are free-choosing, goal-developing and decision-making individuals endowed with reason. In others, they are reactive, and thus unreasonable organisms, behaving in ways which are predictable because amenable to mathematical equations. Although advocating the existence and central role of the former kind in the introductions and conclusions of his works, March proposed portrayals of the latter in the pages in between.

March's organisations

The term "organisation" is interpretable in myriad ways. Depending on the context considered, it refers to firms, charities and their volunteers, sports clubs and their fans, religious movements and their flock, families, etc. The authors of *Organizations* were aware of the difficulty. Repeating the approach that Lave and March (1975) followed about models in the social sciences, March and Simon (1993, p. 20) noted that "it is easier, and probably more useful, to give examples of formal organizations than define the term." They then proceeded to provide a few exemplars (such as the US Steel Corporation, the Red Cross or the local grocery store), but added the following caveat: "For present purposes we need not trouble ourselves about the precise boundaries to be drawn around an "organization" and "nonorganization." We are dealing with empirical phenomena, and the word has an uncomfortable way of not permitting itself to be fitted into clean classifications" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 20).

Admitting that the notion of organisation does not admit an unambiguous definition is a surprising move from authors of a book dedicated to analysing them. Whatever the case, it is self-contradictory to assert that "organisation" refers to an empirical phenomenon and to argue that the precise definition of such a phenomenon is an irrelevant concern. Indeed, one of two situations is possible. If "organisations" are worthy of empirical observation, then a definition must be at least implicitly available for observation to take place. Conversely, if no

precise definition of "organisation" is at hand, then researchers do not know what to observe. In this case, instead of "observation", scholars are condemned to speculation. A worthy endeavour perhaps, but not a scientific one.

Despite their caveat, March and Simon realised that the absence of a definition of "organisation" undermined their book. Indeed, they provided not one but several definitions. In the Introduction to the second edition, they (March and Simon, 1993, p. 2) wrote: "Organizations are systems of coordinated action among individuals and groups whose preferences, information, interests, or knowledge differ." Shortly after, they explained that "organizations are collections of roles and identities, assemblages of rules by which appropriate behavior is paired with recognized situations" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 12). However, a few pages later, the same authors held that "organizations are assemblages of interacting human beings" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 23). To complicate matters further, March and Simon added a fourth definition when they noted, in passing, that an organisation is "a simple mechanism" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 53). It is likely that the book offers additional (if oblique) definitions of "organisation" that the present authors did not identify.

It is unclear if March and Simon's third and fourth definitions of "organisation" are to be received as elaborations of the first two (as the order of presentation suggests) or if these definitions should be received in the reverse order. This ambiguity arises because the first two definitions, being offered in a section specific to the second edition of the book, are additions to the others, which were present in the first version of the book (March and Simon, 1958: 4 and 35, respectively). Whatever the case, if two of these definitions denote observable entities (actions for first, groups of individuals for the third), and thus comply with the first requirement of positivist epistemology, such compliance is not achieved by the second (roles, rules and identities are abstractions; the status of the fourth definition is uncertain because March and Simon did not specify to what sort of mechanism they were referring).

Furthermore, March and Simon's definitions of "organization" are incompatible. Indeed, either organisations are groups of people or they are what these people do or they are collections of roles and rules. To belabour the point: if organisations are groups or people, they are not actions and they are not groups of roles or rules (and vice-versa). Besides, whilst the first definition allows such phrases as "organizational behaviour" (an expression that is recurrent throughout *Organizations* and which forms the title of its first chapter), "organizational action" and "people in organizations" (March and Simon, 1993, pp. 12–13), the second and third definitions do not. Specifically, whereas expressions like "behavioral action" and "actionable action" (if this is what is meant by "organisational behaviour" and "organisational action") are redundant at best, phrases like "people in action" (in the sense of "people inside action") are meaningless. Alternatively, if organisations are groups of roles and rules, then speaking of "organisational behaviour" is meaningless because, from a positivist perspective, roles and rules do not "behave" in any meaningful way or do anything in and of themselves (only people do).

Ambiguity about and equivocations on the term "organization" are widespread in March's work. For example, March wrote (Cyert and March, 1992, p. 164): "We assume that the coalition represented in an organization is a coalition of members having different goals." Such conception amounts to defining organisations as groups of people. However, later in the book, in a sub-section entitled "organization description", the same authors explained (Cyert and March, 1992, p. 202): "We conceive the organization as a communication system and describe it in terms of some dimension of communication [. . .]. Or, we view the system in terms of sociometric choices and describe it as a sociometric

network." These latter comments outline two definitions of "organisation", incompatible between them and with the first (if an organisation is a group of people, it is not a communication system and if an organisation is a communication system it is not a network of choices). In Cyert and March's book, then, three incompatible definitions of organisations are used. The reader is not told which is the correct one or indeed if there is such a thing as a correct definition of "organisation".

In an essay about decision-making, March (1991a, p. 102) explained: "organizations are not individuals, but collections of individuals". As noted, this conception, which is a natural one to adopt for a positivist author, is compatible with, indeed supports, such phrases as "people in organizations", "organizational choice" or "organizational hierarchy". However, a few pages later in the same article, March (1991a, p. 108) advanced the view that organisations are better viewed as "networks of relations", to be studied as "organizational networks". However, if organisations are networks of relations, then the expression "organisational network" is a confusing pleonasm. Besides, a network of relations cannot be said to be equivalent to a group of people without elaboration and qualification which March did not provide.

March has been called a scholar of ambiguity (Xing and Liu, 2018) because he devoted a large part of his work to studying the ambiguities about objectives and the means to pursue them that develop in firms. However, as the preceding analysis of his use of the term "organisation" indicates, March deserves the title of "scholar of ambiguity" for another reason. Indeed, throughout his body of work, March, working alone or in collaboration with Cyert or Simon, used "organisation" indifferently to refer to a "system of coordinated action", "group of people", "group of rules or roles", "simple mechanism" or "network of relations" as if these expressions self-evidently referred to the same idea or were straightforwardly amenable to a coherent definition. Nowhere did March explicitly settle on a definitive meaning for the term. Furthermore, in one article, March united the construct with that of "anarchy" to form the oxymoronic expression "organised anarchy" (Cohen et al., 1972) [2]. The result of such constant equivocation and ambiguity is that readers of March's writings, which are purportedly dedicated to organisations and their behaviour, are left uncertain about what these works are about.

March's theories

In Chapter 1 of *Organisations*, March and Simon (1993, pp. 26–28) warned their readers of the peculiar style they have adopted throughout the book. Their objective is to state testable propositions which describe how organisations operate. To that end, they have identified, for each of them, the dependent and independent variables, to make apparent the "causal arrow" of the "mechanism" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 27) which the propositions embed. This effort is consistent with the authors' overall intention, typical of positivist researchers, to offer theories in the form of synthetic (verifiable) propositions.

Although he did not use the label "synthetic", March's concern for advancing theoretical propositions that qualify as such is apparent. For example, "the lower the satisfaction of the organism, the greater the amount of search it will undertake" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 26) is a synthetic statement, provided that the expressions "satisfaction of the organism" and "amount of search" are separately quantifiable. Similarly, "increases in the balance of inducement utilities over contribution utilities (4.1) decreases the propensity of the individual participant to leave (4.2) the organization" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 112) is, as Weick (2019, p. 1529) observed, trivial (increasing employees' enticements over and above their contributions increases their inclination to remain employees) but nonetheless

synthetic because testable (assuming that the phrases "inducement utilities", "contribution utilities" are "organization" are provided unambiguous meaning).

When researchers advance theories containing terms which do not refer to tangible entities or phenomena, they run the risk of offering propositions that are not synthetic. This risk is exacerbated when their propositions include or rely on reifications, that is, abstractions which have no tangible or phenomenal referent but are treated as if they had one. This is typically the case when authors write of "organisational culture", "strategy", "processes" and "organisations" as if these notions had an autonomous concrete existence aside from that of the human beings who form and animate them. Furthermore, when authors write "organisation" to mean "group of people" without stating who these people are and ascribe faculties or powers to that group, they propose statements that cannot be tested, and which are, therefore, not synthetic. Even attempts to consider "culture", "strategy" or "organisation" as derivative phenomena existing as aggregate activities of individuals are unjustified. Indeed, from a positivist viewpoint, what is there to observe is not aggregated activity but rather individuals who are doing something independently or in cooperation with others. For anyone like March working within the strictures of the positivist epistemology, powers, physical qualities or concrete properties are assignable to tangible entities but not abstract ones. A positivist researcher waiting for an organisation (as distinct from its members) to do something will not know what to observe. More generally, it is noteworthy that to date there is no consensus about the meanings of such intangible constructs as "organisation", "work culture" or "strategy" (Gray et al., 2007).

March was aware of the dangers of reifications. When discussing intra-organisational communication, he reminded his readers, in characteristic positivist fashion, that:

> "The world tends to be perceived by the organization members in terms of the particular concepts that are reflected in the organization's vocabulary. The particular categories and schemes of classification it employs are reified, and become for members of the organization attributes of the world rather than mere conventions" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 186).

However, despite his warning, as Weick (2019, pp. 1532–1533) observed, March constantly relied on reifications when formulating his theories. The following is typical: "Both exploration and exploitation are essential for organizations, but they compete for scarce resources. As a result, organizations make explicit and implicit choices between the two" (March, 1991b, p. 71). Nowhere in the article did March specify the individuals who were doing "exploration" and "exploitation" (board members, executives, managers or front-line employees), and thus making the choices he mentioned. Weick's observation about the prevalence of reifications in March's work amounts to a sweeping and damning criticism of a scholarship developed on positivist epistemology.

When positivist researchers offer propositions which are not amenable to logical demonstration or empirical verification (i.e. propositions which are neither synthetic nor analytic) nor are internally inconsistent, they advance senseless sentences. March was not innocent of this scholarly sin. For instance, he wrote:

> "In the human organism most of the internal state is contained in what we call the memory. The memory includes [...] all sorts of partial and modified records of past experience and programs for responding to environmental stimuli" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 28).

Within a positivist outline, these sentences amount to nonsense because no tangible entity (like the human organism) can be said to possess an abstract idea like "memory", in which it would be possible to store records or, for that matter, anything else. Indeed, people do not "have" memory in the way in which they have a brain or a heart; rather, they are able, or unable, to remember information or experience. "Remember" is a verb; "memory" is an

abstract noun. When on the same page March and Simon elaborated on their proposition by advancing the view that "the human memory content can usually be viewed as divided into two parts", they ventured further away from their positivist epistemology and deeper into senselessness because it is impossible to divide, in a testable way, an abstract construct like "memory" or to say that is has a "content".

Uncertainty about meaning shrouds *Organizations*. Indeed, to a substantial degree, the book is about employee motivation. The construct is used throughout the book as the foundation of most of the theories which are presented in its pages. It appears saliently as "motivation to produce" in Chapter 3 and as "motivation to participate" in Chapter 4. Surprisingly, however, March and Simon did not provide a general definition of motivation. They only offered a definition of "motivation to produce" by way of a theory. In their words: "Motivation to produce (3.38) is a function of the character of the evoked set of alternatives (3.39), the perceived consequences of evoked alternatives (3.340), and the individual goals (3.41) in terms of which alternatives are evaluated" (March and Simon, 1993, p. 72).

Extracting definitive meaning from March and Simon's theory of "motivation to produce" is a difficult endeavour. The difficulty exists because, if by "motivation to produce", they meant "decision (or choice) to produce", then their theory is acceptable but trivial. Indeed, the concept of "decision" (i.e. choice between alternatives) entails that the decision to produce depends on alternatives available, evaluated in terms on their consequences for other objectives. As March and Simon (1993, p. 104) noted about another one of their theories, the proposition "verges on the tautological". It is certainly applicable to any sort of decision and not only of that to produce. Besides, so stated, the testability of the theory is elusive, because the proposition amounts more to a (somewhat convoluted) definition than to a testable statement.

Alternatively, if by "motivation to produce" March and Simon meant, in behaviourist fashion, "cause (or force) of production", then their theory is oxymoronic. Indeed, behaviour (production in this case) cannot be caused (or forced) and chosen at the same time. Either employees are caused to produce, owing to some internal or environmental forces, or they choose to do so after evaluation of alternatives, but they cannot do both at the same time. Yet, this logical impossibility is precisely what March and Simon offered if, through their theory, they implied that "the cause of employee production is a function of alternatives evaluated in terms of their consequences".

In summary, despite March's repeatedly stated intentions, the testability of his theories is dubious. As noted by Weick (2019), their formulation typically invokes reifications and this feature invalidates their synthetic status. Further, March's theories, such as that about the motivation to produce which plays a central role in *Organizations*, are often either trivial or meaningless, depending on how the terms that compose their expression are received.

March's conclusions

When closing his articles and book chapters (as well as elsewhere), March regularly offered the following phraseology (or other formulations of similar meaning) as follows:

"These considerations [...] imply some of the directions in which influence theory and research might fruitfully proceed" (March, 1955, p. 451).

"The five footnotes to organizational change [...] may have some implications for organizational leadership and for research on adaptation in organisations" (March, 1981, p. 574).

"At best, the models presented here suggest some of the considerations involved in thinking about choices between exploration and exploitation" (March, 1991a, p. 85).

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"Our analysis suggests that influence over the motivation to produce is a function of. . ." (March and Simon, 1993, p. 101).

"We have suggested some extensions of the general model for employee participation. . ." (March and Simon, 1993, p. 130).

"We have suggested that there are serious problems in using the theory of the firm. . ." (Cyert and March, 1992, p. 22).

"We have tried to suggest some possible implications of recent work on a behavioural theory of the firm" (Cyert and March, 1992, p. 211).

"We believe the concepts of a behavioral theory of the firm may have some potential relevance" (Cyert and March, 1992, p. 211).

March's commentary on his own work is remarkable on at least two accounts. Firstly, from a positivist standpoint like March's, any sentence that relies on the modal verb "may" or "might" is a tautology, and thus trivially true. Indeed, anything "may" do (imply, proceed, have, etc.) something else, as the opposite of what is proposed is also possible ("may" entails "may not"). Each time March closed an article or a book chapter with a comment to the effect that his theories "may" (variant: might) have practical or theoretical relevance, he, therefore, implied that it is also possible that they have no such relevance. In so doing, March not only distanced himself from his own work but also carved it out of any empirical significance it may (or again may not) have had.

Secondly, a positivist and behaviourist scholar like March can only use the verb "suggest" with great caution. As attested by the 2002 edition of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary, to "suggest" is to "introduce to the mind," to "call to mind by association," to "evoke," to "give the impression," to "serve as a motive or inspiration" or to "imply a possibility or hypothesis." To write, as March so often did, that a theory "suggests" a particular outcome is, thus to insinuate that a subjective process has played out in the formulation of the theory. Within the strictures of positivism, such a feature is not inherently a problem because positivists draw a distinction between observation and inference (Gauch, 2005). However, when such a distinction is not explicitly addressed (as is typically the case in March's books and articles) and is combined with an overall behaviourist stance which proscribes calls to unobservable entities or mental processes, the formulation becomes ambiguous at best. It signals once again that March was distancing himself from his own conclusions or sought to obfuscate their implication.

Given the prevalence of the expression "suggest" in March writings, a possible rejoinder to the charge that such wording is inadequate is to hold that March used "suggest" instead of "infer", "imply", "show" or "demonstrate." This defence establishes the verb "suggest" as a matter of convention, even when embracing positivism. However, inductive reasoning requires the application of statistical principles associated with moving from conclusions about samples to ones about populations, invoking the distinction between observation and inference (Gould and Joullié, 2017). By contrast, there are no protocols associated with suggesting because anything can be said to suggest anything else. Thus, from the perspective of readers accepting positivist epistemology, the use of the verb "suggest" (and others of similar meaning) amounts to casting aspersions on what is proposed. Further, behaviourists such as March can only reject calls to suggestive processes because they are subjective and unobservable, and thus do not make possible the establishment of unambiguous links between stimuli and responses. That March relied on the verb "suggest"

when formulating his conclusions indicates that either he did not fully appreciate the implication of his preferred psychology or he sought to distance himself from the conclusions to which that psychology leads.

In the same vein, March regularly offered propositions which combine modals such as "may", "might", "can" or "could", verbs such as "appear" or "seem", adverbs such as "potentially", "possibly", "likely" or "often" [as in "this seems likely to produce pressures by individuals" (March, 1991a, p. 81)]. This phraseology, which adds further layers of distancing and obfuscation, is prevalent in his writings. For example, in an 11-page article about organisational choice and decision-making theories, March (1982) used "can" (or "could") 54 times, "may" (or "might") 31 times, "possible" (or "possibility") 27 times, "often" 23 times, "seem" (or "seemingly") 22 times, "appear" 13 times, "suggest" 8 times, "likely" 9 times and "potential" 5 times. From a positivist standpoint, the content of such an article can legitimately be questioned.

In summary, there are reasons to believe that March was aware of the uncertain content of his theories. Specifically, the way he regularly concluded his articles, books and book chapters amounts to near-systematic, if subtle, self-distancing from and obfuscation of his work.

Conclusion: reinventing a discipline

March (2007) argued that research in management and organisations studies is typically conducted along either of two lines, the "traditional" or positivist one and the post-modern or "critical" one (a theme picked up in Joullié and Gould, 2021; Rabetino *et al*, 2020; Joullié, 2018; Shepherd and Shepherd, 2013). Considering his implicit epistemological assumptions, March's scholarship is an exemplar of the production of the positivist camp.

As March (2007) noted, most management and organisation scholars looking for an alternative to positivist research have embraced a "critical" or post-modern approach to their discipline. Such conception of organisation and management studies came to existence only towards the end of March's career, principally following the publication of Alvesson and Willmott's (1992) edited collection of essays, *Critical Management Studies*. With varying emphases, critical authors typically hold against positivist researchers that they promulgate managerialist assumptions and neoliberal ideologies under the guise of neutral scientific knowledge, common economic sense and good managerial practice (Grey and Willmott, 2005; Alvesson and Willmott, 2003). Although there are grounds for such a line of criticism, critical management scholarship has achieved little by way of practical implications and theoretical development.

The case for the difficulties faced by critical management and organisation researchers when they want to propose practical and theoretical conclusions has been prosecuted elsewhere (Joullié and Gould, 2021; Joullié and Spillane, 2021; Bowden, 2018; Donaldson, 2003). Rather than rehearsing such criticism here, another argument is worth exposing. Namely, despite their denunciation of positivist research, critical authors still embrace its central objective as follows: theory development and testing. Indeed, as Alvesson and Willmott (2003, p. 1) noted, critical researchers advance "insights drawn from traditions of critical social science [...] to rethink and develop the theory and practice of management." That is, despite their criticism of positivist management research, critical scholars seek to contribute to management scholarship by proposing testable theory (Spicer *et al*, 2009; Adler *et al*, 2007). As Parker and Parker (2017, p. 1367) observed, in critical organisation and management studies, "critique has always been in tension with a desire for influence." This tension has recently intensified and remains unresolved to this day (King and Land, 2018).

Organisation and management scholars wary of positivist research but unconvinced by critical studies have at least one option left. Indeed, rather than pursuing an anti-positivist position, they can pursue a non-positivist one. For example, to obtain insights into human behaviour and society and to share these insights with their students, rather than espousing or rejecting positivist science blindly, organisation researchers can embrace a well-established discipline: philosophy. It is worth remembering that from Plato until about the middle of the twentieth century, that is, until the implementation of the recommendations of the 1959 Ford Foundation report, scholarship and education for business and community leadership included the study of philosophy (Bloom, 2012, pp. 367–371). It is also the case that for more than 2000 years, the foundations for citizenship and community policy making were sought in the *studia humanitatis*, that is, on a critical engagement with the body of knowledge through which people document and come to terms with their existence and their environment. Such a scholarship provided – and still provides – analytical and critical methods of inquiry rooted in an appreciation of diverse human values. Joullié and Spillane (2021) and Spillane and Joullié (2015), are sustained explorations of this theme.

The current article did not discuss the content and legacy of March's scholarship. Rather, the focus has been on March's epistemological and psychological underpinnings and on whether March's portrayals of employees, definitions of organisations, formulation of theories and wording of conclusions were consistent with these underpinnings. This article's conclusion is that such a critical evaluation establishes that March's work falls short of the epistemological standards and psychological models he espoused and advocated. The substance of March's scholarship is ambiguous at best. In its own ways, it illustrates, indeed epitomises, Ghoshal's (2005, p. 77) charge against the "pretense of knowledge" of positivist management and organisation researchers.

To his credit, in addition to the way with which March frequently distanced himself from the conclusions his positivist agenda produced, he embarked, as a retired academic, on a path modelled on that of the *studia humanitatis*. Indeed, in late contributions, March (2003) advocated a return to the great works of Western literature and philosophy as sources of inspirations for organisation scholars. March (2007) also railed against the "myth of organization studies" as these developed in North America since the 1950s (that is, positivist organisation studies) and the "mediocrity" (2007, p. 18) of the research they have produced. If for anything, March should be remembered for his belated coming to terms with the sterility of his erstwhile approach.

Notes

1. The term "behaviourism" covers three separate doctrines. Firstly, metaphysical behaviourism holds that there is no such thing as consciousness; there are only behaving organisms. Secondly, methodological behaviourism maintains that a valid scientific psychology can only study publicly observable behaviour and should not, therefore, be involved with introspection. Thirdly, logical (or analytical) behaviourism argues that psychological concepts can be analysed without loss of meaning in exclusively behavioural terms; that is, the language of mind and mental events can be translated into a behavioural language (Moore, 2001). The concern here is with behaviourist psychology or methodological behaviourism.

2. The two terms contradict each other, as the notion of anarchy precisely implies a lack of organisation, irrespective of how that latter term is understood.

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2.7 : 'Parallel universe' or 'Proven future'? The language of dependent means t-Test interpretations

'Parallel Universe' or 'Proven Future'? The Language of Dependent Means *t*-Test Interpretations

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Of the three kinds of two-mean comparisons which judge a test statistic against a critical value taken from a Student *t*-distribution, one – the repeated measures or dependent-means application – is distinctive because it is meant to assess the value of a parameter which is not part of the natural order. This absence forces a choice between two interpretations of a significant test result and the meaning of the test hypothesis. The parallel universe view advances a conditional, backward-looking conclusion. The more practical proven future interpretation is a non-conditional proposition about what will happen if an intervention is (now) applied to each population element. Proven future conclusions are subject to the corrupting influence of time-displacement, which include the effects of learning, development, and history. These two interpretations are explored, and a proposal for new conceptual categories and nomenclature is given to distinguish them, applicable to other repeated measures procedures derived from the general linear model including ANOVA.

Keywords: *t*-test, parameter, dependent-means, language

Introduction

In the social sciences, whether knowledge is a socially constructed discourse or refers to a stable and given reality that is objectively accessible at least in principle is a question that has attracted contributions for decades. Statistical analysis, traditionally advanced as a means to measure reality, has not been spared criticism. It has been compared to storytelling and thus viewed as a form of conventional discourse (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2012). Although not taking a side in this debate, this articles illustrates the difficulty resulting from the belief the notion of a natural order refers to a given something that can be objectively known. Indeed, when

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making statistical inferences it is sometimes difficult to specify a parameter and to formulate an accurate linguistic description of what a result actually means.

There are two types of reasons why this is so: The first arises from contextual elements concerning the problem or research question itself (Lewin & Somekh, 2011; Tajfel & Fraser, 1986). In practice, this kind of concern manifests when a population is difficult to discern. The second – that which is the focus of this article – occurs because in some circumstances parameters literally do not exist because they are merely conceptual a-priori and post-hoc to an analysis. For example, assuming no control group (elements acting as their own controls) in early drug trial situations, a sample of rats may show tumor reduction following treatment with a putative anti-cancer agent. In such a case, because the treatment has been applied only to the sample, the parameter does not exist in the population at the moment the statistic is calculated. Other examples exist in diverse research paradigms, including: counselling intervention research, organizational development research, and where economic interventions are being assessed. The absence of parameter seems paradoxical, because parameter estimation is the *raison d'être* of parametric statistics.

There is a distinction between dependent means *t*-tests and other mean-related *t*-test applications. Parameters for dependent means *t*-tests literally do not exist. The problem is not that certain parameters are theoretical in the sense that the sampling distribution of means, Student *t*-distributions and the central limit theorem are abstract natural phenomena that conveniently support the logic of an analysis and can as such be simulated. Rather, the point is that dependent means *t*-test parameters are simply not out there to be discovered.

There are two possible interpretations of this non-existence and therefore two ways to interpret a significant dependent means *t*-test result. One of these is conceptually and technically sound but somewhat impractical; it is referred to here as the 'parallel universe' view, because it invites whoever reads about research results to imagine an alternative reality in which an entire population has been subjected to an intervention, rather than just a subset of elements. The other interpretation is less theoretically defensible but more practical; it is called here the 'proven future' view, because it corrals consumers of research to accept the proposition that the future is solely and exclusively determined by the past such that, if the intervention is applied to all subsequent cases, it would yield an outcome comparable to the sample-based result.

One-sample, dependent means, and independent means *t*-tests are intended to identify an actual state of reality, albeit one that it is not easily discoverable and therefore must be inferred from observations of samples (or more precisely sample

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statistics). However, of the various two-mean comparisons available, one in particular – the repeated measures procedure – requires that a distinction be made about which of two possible interpretations should accompany a decision to reject the null hypothesis. The literature addressing the mechanics of two-mean comparisons as well as that discussing advanced repeated measures procedures which use the general linear model (e.g. ANOVA-based analyses) mostly either overlooks or does not well elucidate this point. This is unfortunate, because there are methodological and conceptual advantages that flow from giving a more nuanced understanding of the consequence of a missing parameter. Such benefits concern, from an applied perspective, interpretation; and, from a teaching/explanatory perspective, a deepening of understanding. Whatever the case, the existence of two possible interpretations of a dependent means *t*-test result has implications for experimental control which mostly have not received enough attention. They are sufficiently important to necessitate the creation of a new nomenclature and a new way of distinguishing between population frequency distributions.

Three Research Designs Necessitating a Two-Mean Comparison: The Dependent Means Case as Special

There are so-called parametric data analysis situations where population parameters literally do not exist. This is not to say that their values are impractical to calculate, nor does it imply that an understanding of their nature is not as important as it always was. Rather, some parameters do not exist in the sense that they cannot, in theory or practice, be calculated. Hence, when speaking of a parameter, for example in a dependent means *t*-test, it is especially important to be clear about the meaning of a significant test statistic and the associated decision to reject the null hypothesis. Textbooks as well as many studies that use a dependent means protocol for data analysis typically give this matter only cursory consideration (e.g. Mason, Lind, & Marchal, 1999; Gravetter & Wallnau, 1995; Wright, 1997; Baillargeon, 2012; Salkind, 2011). Such superficial or dismissive treatment leads to inadequate control of time-dependent and potentially confounding variables, and as a consequence, to imprecise or erroneous conclusions.

In the quest to produce statistically significant results, data analysts frequently advocate dependent means designs to reduce a sampling distribution's variation and to create a greater *t*-value, arguing that fewer degrees of freedom is a price worth paying for a smaller test statistic denominator (e.g. Gravetter & Wallnau, 1995). However, those who are less concerned with statistical significance and more

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interested in contextual and ethnographic elements of a problem often favor between- over within-subjects designs (e.g. Lewin & Somekh, 2011; Adams, Khan, Raeside, & White, 2007). For these latter theorists, carry-over effects and other, more general concerns about experimental control are especially important. Such researchers are mostly satisfied that, in lieu of a control group, a matched-pair design where subjects act as their own controls is practical despite being potentially a theoretically compromised solution (Lewin & Somekh, 2011; Alasuutari, Bickman, & Brannen, 2009).

Repeated measures procedures are sometimes viewed as being plagued by the problem of time-related confounding influences (e.g. Cousineau, 2009). This concern is more fruitfully analyzed as the manifestation of an inexistent parameter. Such a perspective makes clear that two options for interpreting a significant result are possible. To understand what is meant by an inexistent parameter, three representations of typical two-mean comparison situations are presented in the first row of Figure 1. Beside each representation is a depiction of the population distribution, the sampling distribution of the mean, and formulae for calculating a test result (to be compared with an appropriate critical value drawn from a Student t-distribution when testing hypotheses). To improve clarity and concision, confidence interval formulae are not presented in Figure 1, only hypothesis testing and rejection of the null hypothesis are discussed. The conclusions and insights offered are equally relevant to confidence interval applications. Furthermore, such findings can be extended to more advanced applications of the general linear model such as ANOVA-based procedures.

In row 1.1 of Figure 1, the one-sample case, a statistic (mean) is calculated and indirectly compared to a parameter which actually exists but which is 'hidden', difficult or impractical to discover. (The statistic is compared indirectly because it is compared with the mean for the sampling distribution of the mean that is equal to but not the same as the population mean.) The fact that the parameter is hiding in such situations can be appreciated with a thought experiment. Imagine that, at the same time that a statistic is being calculated using the formula in the last cell of row 1.1, another person is calculating the actual population parameter (μ). In such a case, the aim would be to see how close an obtained statistic falls from the calculated specified population value. Now also imagine that an analyst substituted the parameter (mean) for the population (μ) for the parameter (mean) of its sampling distribution of the mean (μ_M). This manipulation would allow an obtained statistic (M) to be compared with a parameter value of interest (μ) rather than with its proxy value, the mean for the sampling distribution of the mean (μ_M). If this

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Figure 1. Key elements of three kinds of two-mean comparison *t*-test applications

Note: [1]Depicted as normal although, due to the Central Limit Theorem, a normally distributed population frequency is not essential for applying a *t*-test procedure. [2]Depicted as normal because it is assumed that samples used to create the sampling distribution of the mean are of a size $n > 12$ and $n < 30$ (Central Limit Theorem)

were to occur, $t = (M - \mu_M) / \tilde{\delta}_M$ would become $t = (M - \mu) / \tilde{\delta}_M$. Like the orthodox technique, this manipulation would yield the correct result. However, it would be bizarre because it would be standardizing a score (μ) from a non-related distribution,

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the population distribution, with two elements (M and δ_M) from the sampling distribution of the mean. Aside from being conceptually unsound, this change in formula adds an arduous and unrealistic additional step to the procedure.

However, parameter substitution could be done and could be synchronized to coincide with calculation of the test statistic ($t_{obtained}$). In such a case, the analyst would make the rejection/non rejection decision at the same moment that they became aware of the real population mean. They would have used a procedure which bypasses the step which relies on the central limit theorem to prove that $\mu = \mu_M$ (Gravetter & Wallnau, 1995; Wright, 1997; Baillargeon, 2012). One-sample t-test situations of the kind just described (and depicted in row 1.1 of Figure 1) are somewhat rare but nonetheless occasionally important. For example, to measure the temperature of bath water, it is possible to put a thermometer in the bath itself or to take a cupful of water as a representative sample of the liquid and plunge a thermometer therein to record a reading. In this latter case, the researcher would subsequently make an inference about the bath temperature from the cup temperature.

Row 1.2 of Figure 1 is a depiction of an independent means application of a t-test. This technique has some conceptual similarity with the one-sample t-test case discussed above; for example, the parameter of interest here ($\mu_1 - \mu_2$) exists to be discovered before, during, and after the calculation of a test statistic. Once again, in a sense, the parameter may be thought of as hiding, but nonetheless part of the natural order. Another thought experiment makes this clear. Imagine that there was a binary independent variable, say gender, taking two possible values, male or female in this instance. Imagine that an interval-scaled dependent variable was height; the hypothesis for testing (H_1) was that males are taller than females in the population; and the null hypothesis (H_0) was that males are not taller than females in the population. The characteristics of this problem require analysis using an independent means t-test. Specifically, a test t-value (t-statistic) could be calculated to be compared with a critical value drawn from a Student t-distribution (with $n_1 + n_2 - 2$ degrees of freedom). In such a case, the statistic ($M_M - M_F$) is tangible. Further, at the instant of its calculation, there also exists a real, equally tangible population mean for height for males (μ_M) and a real, equally tangible population mean for height for females (μ_F). Although these two population values and their difference ($\mu_M - \mu_F$) may be difficult or impractical to calculate, they are a real part of the natural order that is perhaps hidden but nonetheless there at the moment that a $t_{obtained}$ value is being compared to a $t_{critical}$ value.

When it comes to the dependent means t-test – a protocol which mostly aims to assess the consequence of an intervention – the parameter does not exist at the

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moment a statistic is calculated. It is not part of reality because each element of the population is not yet present in the post-intervention state. Hence, in such a case, a $t_{obtained}$ cannot be calculated through substituting μ_d for $\mu_{d(mean)}$. The broken-line depictions in the first cell of row 1.3 of Figure 1, where the distributions of (μ_2) and (μ_d) are stylized portrayals of the population in the post-intervention state, indicate this state of affairs. As such, together they represent one member of a family of future scenarios. Textbook authors are typically unclear about this point, with disparate recommendations offered for drawing a conclusion (e.g. Adams et al., 2011; Cousineau, 2009; Mason et al., 1999; Gravetter & Wallnau, 1995; Wright, 1997; Baillargeon, 2012; Salkind, 2011). In fact, scholars are inclined to offer one of either two antithetical ways of addressing this missing parameter and its associated missing sampling distribution. The first of these is technically and conceptually correct but impossible to operationalize (e.g. Gravetter & Wallnau, 1995; Wright, 1997; Levin & Fox, 2000); it will henceforth be referred to as the 'parallel universe' view.

For example, Gravetter and Wallnau (1995), in commenting on a significant result for a matched-pair intervention procedure aimed at controlling asthma symptoms using relaxation, concluded, "Relaxation training resulted in a decrease in the number of doses of medication needed to control asthma symptoms. This reduction was statistically significant, $t(4) = -3.72$, $p = 0.05$, two-tailed" (p. 256). Similarly, Wright (1997) interpreted the result of a significant dependent-means *t*-test by saying "an effect was detected" (p. 53). Furthermore, Levin and Fox (2000), in drawing a conclusion about a significant dependent-means *t*-statistic concerning the efficacy of a remedial math intervention, stated, "The remedial math program has produced a statistically significant improvement in math ability" (p. 227). In each of these cases, past tense conditional verb conjugation was used. Hence, in rejecting the null-hypothesis, a backward-looking conditional inference was invoked with the linguistic structure: If each element of the population had been subjected to the same intervention that was applied to the sample, there would have been a difference in the pre- and post-intervention population means.

The second way of dealing with the missing parameter conundrum is to assert or assume tacitly that an intervention on the population of the kind that was applied to the sample will affect the population as it affected the sample (e.g. Mason et al., 1999; Levin & Rubin, 1998; Elliott & Woodward, 2007). Such conclusions are often parsed in the present or future tense. For example, Mason et al. (1999), wrote "is a difference" (p. 369) to describe the state of a population following a significant dependent-means *t*-test result. This conclusion has a prospective focus. Similarly, Levin and Rubin (1998), in commenting on significantly improved typing speeds

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for secretaries using new word-processing software in a pre-test/post-test design, concluded "The difference in typing speed can be attributed to the different word processors" (p. 473). A similar conclusion was offered by Elliott and Woodward (2007) who, in interpreting the effectiveness of a weight-loss regime following a significant dependent means t-test result stated, "We reject H_0 and conclude that the diet is effective; $t(14) = 2.567$, one-tailed, $p = 0.001$" (p. 73).

These interpretations of a dependent-means protocol make a claim about the future. Owing to control-related confounding influences arising from time-displacement, such 'proven future' inferences are technically and conceptually more spurious than those concerning a parallel universe. However, proven future interpretations are attractive because they are inclined to be practical. They are, in a sense, the *raison d'être* for a repeated measures protocol (Fortin, Côte, & Filion, 2006).

These examples were extracted from data analysis textbooks. Textbook authors typically do not give a clear rationale for the way their conclusions are formulated, which makes them appear arbitrary. It is therefore not surprising to find that the applied literature perpetuates this lack of clarity. However, this literature also reveals some patterns. For example, medical research tends to favor a proven future interpretation. Thus, Kutcher, Wei, and Morgan (2015) concluded their study by noting that "these results [i.e., those obtained from their intervention] suggest a simple but effective approach to improving MHL [mental health literacy] in young people" (p. 580). Comparable inferences are found in studies investigating educational-type interventions. According to Baykara, Demir, and Yaman (2015), "ethics education given to students enables them to distinguish ethical violations" (p. 661); Azarbarzin, Malekian, and Taleghani (2015) inferred "supportive-educative programs can enhance some aspects of quality of life" (p. 577). Additional examples are Lau, Li, Mak, and Chung (2004), Scott and Graham (2015), Garst and Ozier (2015), or again, Pritchard, Hansen, Scarboro, and Melnic (2015). This dominance of the proven future interpretation is understandable because medical or educational interventions are intended to be therapeutic and/or remedying. In such circumstances, incentives often exist strongly to push the case for a putative treatment.

Compared with proven future interpretations, parallel universe inferences are less commonly found in the applied literature, although they do exist. For example, Fee, Gray, and Lu (2013), in commenting on improvement in cross-cultural awareness following a stint in a foreign country, reported "expatriates' level of cognitive complexity increased significantly during the 12-month study period" (p. 299).

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Two Interpretations of a Significant Dependent-Means *t*-Test Result: Parallel Universe versus Proven Future

The parallel universe interpretation of a significant dependent-means *t*-test result uses past-tense conditional verb conjugation to describe what would have happened if each member of a population had been subjected to the intervention which was applied to the sample. This emphasis is on an imagined alternative reality in which each element of a population is subjected to a treatment protocol at the same moment that elements of the sample were so subjected. Remembering that such an interpretation is offered following the finding of a significant *t*-test result, it can only be hypothetical because it is not possible to go back in time. In this sense, analysts who rely on it offer a conclusion that has limited practical utility.

Alternatively, a significant dependent means *t*-test result may be used to reject the null hypothesis with the conclusion that, if an intervention is applied to all members of a population, the post-hoc mean would be different to the a-priori mean. This proven future statement has implications for practice. However, it is less likely than the parallel universe view to reflect reality, because it is vulnerable to a source of control-related error, namely time-displacement effects. Time-displacement is an umbrella term covering at least three circumscribed classes of phenomena: development/maturation, non-treatment-related learning, and historical events (Fortin et al., 2006). Each of these has implications for interpretation of a significant dependent means *t*-test finding that deserve further discussion.

Development/maturation is a relatively permanent change in behavior, values, or cognition that cannot be accounted for by experience or a health-related event such as illness or injury (Demetriou, 1998; Upton, 2011). For example, normally developing babies do not learn to walk (Upton, 2011); rather, regardless of whether they have been trained or otherwise instructed, babies typically take their first steps at between 11 to 15 months of age with a normal distribution of habitual infant bipedalism centered on a mean of 13 months (Upton, 2011). Suppose there were theoretical grounds for challenging the maturational perspective of the emergence of upright walking behavior in healthy human beings and that it was possible to train babies to walk earlier than they otherwise would. Further, suppose that there was a misconception about when infants generally walk upright and that it was believed that they mostly crawl until they are at least 18 months old. In such a case, it would be worthwhile to take a sample of 11 to 12-month old babies, measure their propensity towards bipedalism on a suitable scale, subject them to 'mobility-training', and then re-measure them on the same instrument in a matched-pair one-tailed hypothesis-test design.

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If this analysis did not yield a significant dependent means t-test result, it would have if the three phases of the study (pre-test measurement, intervention, and post-test measurement) had been instituted over a longer period. What this suggests is that a significant test result can be caused by a third, maturation-related variable and thus have nothing to do with the intervention. However, it is also possible for a particular cohort of babies ('late walkers'), a treatment intervention decreases the mean age of bipedalism from 14 months to 13 months. To demonstrate such an effect through a repeated measures protocol, the delay between each phase of the study must be kept minimal; the longer the delay, the less informative would be the assessed post-intervention state. Hence, when there are two population frequency distributions depicted on a single axis with values representing points in time as levels of an independent variable (prior to walking training and following walking training in this example), a proven-future interpretation of a significant test statistic is likely to be misleading. Hence, claims about what will occur remain at best ambiguous and at worst spurious when maturation is an alternative explanation for change on the dependent variable. A key problem here is that the existence of such a competing explanation is not necessarily known.

Learning is a relatively permanent change in behavior, value, or cognition that occurs as a consequence of experience and not as a result of either maturation or a traumatic health-related event (Schacter, Gilbert, & Wegner, 2011). For example, school district officials may implement a stranger-danger initiative to discourage children from accepting lifts with adults who they do not know. The creators of such an initiative want to determine if their intervention changes behavior. They institute a pre-test/post-test repeated measures assessment protocol (before and after the stranger-danger intervention using a sample) and establish a suitable index of childhood propensity to accept rides from strangers as a dependent variable.

In a case like this, the null hypothesis is typically that the stranger-danger intervention does not influence children to be less inclined to accept a ride from people they do not know and the one-tailed test hypothesis is that the stranger-danger intervention makes children less inclined to accept a ride from people they do not know. Suppose that a significant t-test value for this analysis is not obtained at the orthodox Type-1 error rate of $\alpha = 0.01$, and therefore the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. However, the researchers notice that if they make the test slightly less conservative, say by adjusting the Type-1 error rate to $\alpha = 0.05$, they obtain a significant result and can therefore reject the null hypothesis. Further, assume that, on the night of the intervention, there is a lead news story about the abduction and murder of a child who accepted a ride from a stranger.

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This story is followed up over the ensuing days. In such a case, the timing of the three elements of the study, once again, becomes important. From a practical standpoint, it is likely that the almost significant *t*-test result would underestimate the effect of the intervention if it were – in the future – carried out on all members of the population. Hence, in this example, a *t*-test that was non-significant on one day may be significant on the following day (i.e., after the nightly news). This phenomenon, once again, highlights the importance of keeping the amount of time between pre-measurement, intervention, and post-measurement to a minimum, although it is unclear how small that minimum should be. What is generally true is that, the more protracted this delay, the more the subjects (or sample elements) are exposed to stimuli which can elicit learning of an unplanned and uncontrolled, but nonetheless systematic, nature.

An historical occurrence is a time-displacement effect that can be viewed as a special case of learning; special in the sense that it is not cyclical or typical. (Certain events are rare or one-off in nature; they are not amenable to measurement even if they can be said to create a 'new normal.' The assassination of President Kennedy is a case in point: it was an unprecedented event in twentieth-century American history and created new and enduring anxieties about the welfare of political leaders. Conversely, child abductions and murders are unfortunately recurring events in large societies; new cases regularly appear and their occurrence can be quantified in probabilistic terms where a numerator is non-zero and is all instances where an event could have occurred.)

For example, suppose that on September 10, 2001, there is a study taking place in New York City that aims to determine if a particular intervention intended to help those who are anxious about flying in an airplane overcome their fear. Following a pre-test/post-test pairing protocol, a dependent means *t*-test is used to analyze data in a one-tailed improvement versus no-improvement hypothesis. A significant test result is obtained, the null hypothesis is rejected and the researcher concludes that the intervention is efficacious. As noted, however, two interpretations are possible. The first (the parallel universe view) says, all things being equal and if all members of the population of interest had received the intervention at the time the study was being carried out, there would have been a mean improvement on the dependent variable (fear of flying). Such an interpretation, although not especially useful because it is purely hypothetical, controls best for potential historical influences; indeed, its linguistic formulation makes it invulnerable to competing explanations arising from time-displacement.

The alternative interpretation (the proven future inference) is misrepresentative in the case described. On September 11, 2001, there were high-

predictor of the future in the same sense that gravity, for example, can always be relied upon to occur. It is therefore in the social sciences where the choice between the two interpretations of a within-subjects finding becomes especially relevant.

Irrespective of their field of study, researchers, because of the nature of what they do (in particular when engaging in funded research where significant results are typically those that are rewarded), are inclined to favor the proven future interpretation of significant dependent-mean *t*-test results. Two possible factors influence this phenomenon. First (the focus here), not enough consideration is given to the protocol of interpretation. The second is more psychological and arises from researchers' desires to be consequential in their endeavors. Where parallel universe interpretations exist in the literature, they tend to be made implicitly as if researchers lacked confidence to make an inference about their population of interest.

Whatever the case, it is noteworthy that the choice between a parallel universe and a proven future interpretation represents a trade-off: the former is less prone to confounding influences but is less practical (no one can go back in time), the latter is more practical but more prone to confounding influences from time displacement effects. In reporting results, this compromise should be acknowledged and its consequences with respect to the research problem emphasized. When explaining procedures and depicting the elements of an analysis in diagrammatic form, the trade-off perspective can be highlighted through using broken-lines to indicate those frequency distributions which can only occur in the future. Such a convention could be used to signal that certain distributions exist only in a particular future, one which is contingent on the ubiquitous presence of the second level of the independent variable (i.e. the post-intervention state). Two such contingent within-subjects future distributions (which could be depicted with broken lines) would be the population distribution after all elements of the population have received an intervention (μ_2; σ_2) and the difference between each element of a population before and after an intervention (μ_d; σ_d). Use of such a nomenclature would flag the distinctiveness of the repeated measures procedure and serve as a reminder that certain parameters (e.g. μ_2; σ_2; μ_d; σ_d) are missing for the moment and contingent on a forthcoming population-wide intervention.

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profile terrorist attacks directed towards targets in New York and elsewhere in the United States involving hijacked commercial airplanes. A significant result for the efficacy of a fear of flying initiative obtained on September 10 would presumably not have been produced if the pre-test measurement was made on September 10 and the intervention (and measurement protocol) instituted on the afternoon of September 11.

Conclusion

Using the case of the *t*-test as an exemplar of other repeated measures designs such as ANOVA, the emphasis here is on interpreting matched-pair hypothesis test results. Questions concerning the strengths and weaknesses of between- versus within-subjects designs have not been addressed. Similarly, the focus has not been on what to do about time-displacement confounding effects, when they are likely to occur, or on techniques for controlling for them. Rather, the focus here has been merely on interpretation. In studies that investigate, by way of a dependent means protocol, the value of a parameter which does not exist as part of the natural order, two types of interpretations are possible when the *t*-test result is significant: parallel universe or proven future. Although each of these is equivalent in its description of what is being observed, each differs in its practical utility.

The parallel universe view is best suited to circumstances where it is reasonable to believe that time displacement effects are credible alternatives to an observed change in the dependent variable following manipulation of the independent variable. Such cases typically exist in (but are not limited to) the social sciences, even when researchers believe that the reality they study is unaffected by their investigations. Although within-subjects designs have the potential to reduce the standard error of the mean and hence increase the likelihood of statistical significance, they control for a more limited range of confounding influences than between-subjects designs. This disadvantage is not insurmountable unless and until time displacement effects can offset or compound the changes introduced when an independent variable is manipulated. In such instances, theorists typically propose the idea of a control group as the solution (Lewin & Somekh, 2011; Adams et al., 2011; Tajfel & Fraser, 1986). However, the creation of a control group is not always practicable.

The alternative is the proven future interpretation. In the physical sciences, the possibility of time-displacement effects are perhaps lesser than in the social sciences. In these kinds of situations, 'proven future' views are often easier to justify; intuitively this seems reasonable because the past is always the best

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Article

Clustered Iconography: A Resurrected Method for Representing Multidimensional Data

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Abstract

Development of graphical methods for representing data has not kept up with progress in statistical techniques. This article presents a brief history of graphical representations of research findings and makes the case for a revival of methods developed in the early and mid-twentieth century, notably ISOTYPE and Chernoff's faces. It resurrects and improves a procedure, clustered iconography, which enables the presentation of multidimensional data through which readers engage more effectively with the presentation's central message by way of an easier understanding of relationships between variables. The proposed technique is especially well adapted to the needs and protocols of open-source research.

Keywords

iconography, multidimensional data, graphical methods, ISOTYPE, cluster

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Introduction

Appropriate presentation of research findings is a conundrum faced by both qualitative and quantitative investigators. Insofar as it is endemic to the write-up phase of a project, the challenge of making results intelligible, transparent and subject to the critical scrutiny of a broad readership is not new. Indeed, the problem has been wrestled with since at least the time of Florence Nightingale who, faced with daunting practical communication challenges, made pioneering advances in these domains. However, the urgency of the dilemma has been growing over the last two decades. For example, in 2012, a study reported that the worldwide presence of data and databases is at an all-time high (Digital Universe 2012). The same study stressed that, for the potential of this corpus to be realized, innovation was needed in methods of display and interpretation. At that time, there were 2.8 trillion gigabytes of stored data in the world. Since then, global capacity has increased, with authors such as Petrov (2019) estimating that the worldwide stockpile will exceed 40 trillion gigabytes (40 zettabytes) at some stage in 2020.

In parallel with data proliferation during the digital age, there has been a rise of increasingly sophisticated analytic software (e.g., *Stratgraphics, Looker, MATLAB*) and an expanding array of approaches concerned with formulaic-based methods of transformation (e.g., recursive partitioning). This is especially true in the social sciences where by the 1960s and 1970s the content scope of and readership for sociology literature were unambiguously broader than for disciplines such as political science, psychology, or economics (Healy and Moody 2014; Paechter et al. 2017). Insofar as non-technical considerations are concerned, a growing pressure for publicly-funded research to be subject to broad scrutiny, particularly in the social sciences, has formed much of the context for scholarly enterprise and created new sources of angst for those engaged in such endeavour (e.g., "European Countries" 2018; Eisenberg and Nelson 2002). Hence, the overall scenario created from the confluence of influences pertaining to technical advance and the dissemination imperative place modern social science researchers in an increasingly stressful situation. On the one hand, they have more data to work with (and justify using or excluding) and are expected to invoke cutting-edge, but invariably alienating, methods of analysis. On the other hand and paradoxically, they are under pressure to bring into the fold the lay public.

When it comes to communicating research findings to reading audiences who lack analytic training and sophistication, modern scholars—be they

working in the qualitative or quantitative tradition—often face a compromise. Specifically, they must trade-off extracting maximum meaning from data with retaining comprehensibility. Making this judgment call is unduly thorny because, for many, it is becoming difficult to appreciate the potential and limits of individual techniques. Some years ago, Hellems, Gurka and Hayden (2007:1083) summed-up the situation when they noted that it is "increasingly unrealistic to expect readers fully to understand the statistical analyses used in journal articles." Indeed, just in the quantitative domain, growing complexity has been associated with the emergence of "statistics anxiety" (Chew and Dillon 2014; Onwuegbuzie 2004; Paechter et al. 2017). The literature addressing this malaise is somewhat incomplete but nonetheless revealing. For example, approximately 80 percent of U.S. university graduate students experience stress-related symptoms associated with having to master quantitative methods (Onwuegbuzie 2004), with compounding consequences on their course achievement (Chew and Dillon 2014; Fitzgerald, Jurs and Hudson 1996; Paechter et al. 2017).[1] In very recent times, new and more disquieting findings concerning this phenomenon have come to light with researchers such as Siew, McCartney and Vitevitch (2019) concluding that skittishness about research methods generally and avoidance of courses in this domain, in particular, is a key contributor to student attrition at university. It is noteworthy also that it is not just in relation to quantitative methods that people struggle. In fact, as Vitevitch (2016) notes, lack of confidence about undertaking and interpreting output from qualitative approaches makes the statistics anxiety syndrome seem unduly narrow in its focus. The proliferation of theoretical perspectives and discipline-specific terminology has created a broader phenomenon, which Wurman (1989) originally called "information anxiety" and others more recently have labeled "infobesity" (Rogers, Puryear and Root, 2013), "infoxication" (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2014) and "information explosion syndrome" (Buckland 2017).

Analytic complexity does not just concern researchers or those charged with making a point about data. It also affects journal publishers and others interested in communication of research findings, including, ultimately, the reader. The reason for this is simply stated: the results sections of modern scholarly articles have become increasingly complex and sophisticated. The case of a high-quality journal with a practitioner focus is illustrative: in 1983, readers of *The New England Journal of Medicine* with an understanding of only basic descriptive statistics could comprehend 59 percent of its articles. In 2004, the equivalent figure was just 6 percent (Strasak et al. 2007). The case of *The New England Journal of Medicine* is not unique. Indeed, the

problem reaches its zenith in sociology journals. For example, publications such as the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology* routinely present many tables, few figures with a degree of opaqueness concerning how authors moved from data to conclusions (Healy and Moody 2014). By contrast, in journals such as *Science*, *Nature* and the *National Academy of Science*, articles are typically associated with one (or sometimes several) graphical displays as their centerpiece and in this sense offer conclusions which are more auditable (Healy and Moody 2014).

While the use of analytic methods for data interpretation has become more complex and alienating, deployment of relatively simple displays has fallen by the wayside. For example, Healy and Moody (2014) make the somewhat counterintuitive point that, compared with natural sciences, there has been a paucity of innovation of data visualization techniques in the social sciences generally and sociology in particular (Pauwels 2010). More recently, McFarland, Lewis and Goldberg (2016) made a similar point. On the same topic but twenty years earlier, Cheng and Simon (1995) noted that in leading social science journals, data analysis involving algorithms and formulae as a principal means of making a point is up to three times more common than visual data presentation. Anecdotal observation of current literature does not suggest a change in this proportion. Indeed, recently scholars such as Healy and Moody (2014:106) have pointed out that "visualisation mostly remains an afterthought in sociology." These authors are unclear about why this domain-specific neglect has arisen in the twenty-first century. After all, it was the social sciences that, several decades earlier, revealed the potential of visual display techniques. Specifically, Anscombe (1973) dramatically showed that two data sets with near identical statistical properties—notably their bivariate regression lines—can manifest as starkly different when presented on a set of scatterplots (the scatterplots in fact are more revealing). Moreover, authors such as Jackman (1980) who, in examining voter-turnout behavior as a function of income inequality, exposed the walloping influence of outlier data points in small data sets. Such revelation would not have been possible without resort to use of graphical displays; more specifically, without making a contrast between visually based and formulaic techniques. More recently, Chatterjee and Firat (2007) reached a similar conclusion.

This article briefly canvasses the history of the techniques used for the graphical exposition of research findings and examines their theoretical and methodological limitations. Based principally on an analysis of these deficiencies and inspired by what Edward Tufte (1983, 1990, 1997, 2007) described as the most compelling visual image conveying data that has ever been produced, it proposes a new general approach, called *clustered*

iconography. By way of summary, this technique revives and improves the tradition of graphic illustration. It heralds a return to a largely forgotten movement that flourished a century ago, the aim of which was to increase data accessibility through picture-based displays. These early efforts focused mostly on presenting quantitative results and typically entailed representing numerically encoded findings in a raw or summative form (Onwuegbuzie and Dickinson 2008).

It is noteworthy that the approach presented in the present article is sufficiently versatile to showcase results derived using qualitative methodologies. Indeed, for practitioners and in particular consumers of research, graphical techniques help make findings easier to understand and foster better engagement with data, be it quantitative or qualitative. For researchers, such newly minted techniques, especially the one presented in this article, offer increased transparency of results and the ability to include rather than eliminate unusual cases from analysis. For reasons that will be made explicit, clustered iconography is largely blind to qualitative versus quantitative differences but instead embraces what Goering and Streiner (2013) described as "reconcilable differences" between each kind of approach. The technique to be defended also builds on Pauwels's (2010:545) "Integrated Framework" (presented in *Sociological Methods & Research*) insofar as it at least partly "connects and transcends" the strengths of the visual display modes and techniques currently available.

This article argues that clustered iconography is well suited to the imperatives of modern research in general and to those of sociological research in particular. This is the case because, in overcoming some of the limits of traditional graphical approaches, the technique offers an alternative to complex data transformation. While the method makes no claim to replace either current text-heavy methodologies for presenting qualitative data or number, table and chart-based methods of depicting quantitative findings, it provides more summative power than the former, as well as greater transparency and ability to handle outliers than the latter. These advantages build on some recognized benefits of visual display techniques. In this vein, as Langley (1999) argued, picture-based data presentation stimulates the entertaining of hypotheses by readers.

A Short History of Methods for Displaying Research Findings

The development of visual display techniques predates written languages, not to mention modern statistics. One has just to consider, for example,

prehistorical evidence showing that early hunters used notches or other marks to keep track of their kill rates (Cartmill 2009). However, the objective of this section is not to offer a comprehensive chronological survey of graphical representation methods. More modestly, the intention is to highlight salient aspects of immediate antecedents to the proposed technique.

As a process-related point, for exposition purposes a historical perspective of graphical methods is chosen to showcase precursor techniques for two reasons. First, such an approach organically reveals how methods emerged mostly in response to circumscribed practical problems. Indeed, using chronology as opposed to, say, a cross-sectional conceptual taxonomy (as is done in Pauwels 2010) to describe techniques starkly reveals that although each approach was intended to address a need, each also embodied something of a trade-off. Specifically, the resolution of one problem was associated with the beginning of another. The second reason a historical approach is used to present graphical techniques concerns the fact that much early innovation in visual displays comes from sociologists and was a response to sociological content matter. Indeed, early sociology journal articles are often replete with bar charts (Hart 1896), line graphs (Marro 1899), parametric density plots and dot plots with standard errors (Chapin 1924), scatterplots (Sletto 1939) and social network diagrams (Lundberg and Steele 1938). However, despite such an auspicious initial contribution to the development of visual techniques, somewhere along the way, academic sociologists have mostly ceased to be innovative in this area. More precisely, in key respects, they have lost ground, simultaneously becoming vanilla in their tastes and unambitious with their solutions. A case for the proposed technique emerges from such neglect and is inspired by the artistry embodied in an image created during the nineteenth century. As such, the method at the heart of this article addresses long-identified inadequacies, largely breaks free from the trade-off paradigm and reinvigorates the discipline of sociology as having something important to say about data presentation.

By way of preamble, of the four techniques surveyed (graphs, visual languages, concept mapping and clustered representations such as Chernoff's faces), the technique to which clustered iconography leans on to the greatest degree, Chernoff's faces, is also that which has almost completely fallen into disuse.

Graphs

In 1637, French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes was the first to link Euclidean geometry with algebra through two- and three-dimensional
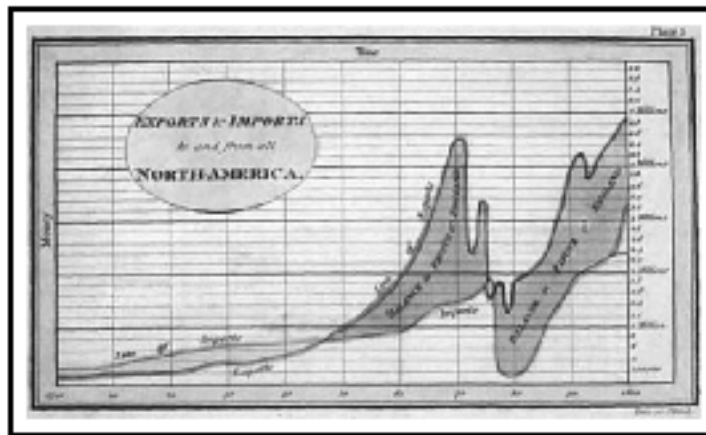
Figure 1. A graph, showing exports and imports from England to North America (Playfair 1786).

(now called Cartesian) co-ordinates along x, y and z axes. In the early nineteenth century, as statistics as a method of systematic communication of research findings developed, the need also to create ways for visually presenting data and patterns in data emerged. A seminal figure pushing this latter agenda was Scottish engineer William Playfair. For the first time, in 1786, Playfair produced techniques for showing how parts relate to wholes (Beninger and Robyn 1978; Spence 2005). Somewhat inspired by the problems occasioned by small data sets and missing data, he relied on Cartesian coordinates to develop strategies such as the line graph (see Figure 1), the bar chart, the pie chart and the circle graph (Beninger and Robyn 1978; Spence 2005). Playfair's depiction of Scottish imports and exports to and from 17 countries in 1781 has been lauded as the first "pure" solution to the problem of discreet quantitative comparison (Tufte 2007). Previously, data had typically only been located spatially (i.e., using coordinates or with tables) or through creating time lines, a technique developed two decades earlier by Joseph Priestly as a means of comparing life spans.

Playfair's efforts found multiple applications. For example, they were not lost on Florence Nightingale who, working as a nurse during the Crimean War, reformed nineteenth -century public health administration and arguably inventing the discipline when she transformed unwieldy numbers-based tables into graphical formats to convey key points to the British government (Cohen 1984). During this period and later during when she became interested in developing a solution to India's sanitation problem, Nightingale

hybridized certain of Playfair's descriptions to develop the "polar area diagram" (sometimes known as the Nightingale-Rose Diagram). These images resemble a circular histogram and were originally used to illustrate seasonal sources of hospital patient mortality. In their review of pre-twentieth-century data display techniques, Miles and Huberman (1984) identify other methods indebted to Descartes and Playfair. These include context charts (charts that show variables that are assumed to interact), growth gradients (similar to line graphs), portfolio matrices, scatterplots and state-flow charts (focusing on salient events during a given time period). Similar, possibly less comprehensive, reviews of graphical techniques in the tradition of Descartes and Playfair have been done recently (e.g., Inselberg 2009). Such approaches are known to today's researchers; indeed, they are incorporated as standard output options of common statistical software, such as cloud functions in *R* and *SAS*. Depictions created using these computer-based methods resemble scatterplots but present a three-dimensional display that, in some cases, are rotatable.

Visual Languages

Nightingale was not the only person to use problems occasioned by war as an impetus to develop better data-communication techniques. Indeed, twentieth-century military conflicts inspired other theorists. For example, the first World Esperanto Congress took place in 1905 to promote a universal language to foster world peace and international understanding. In some respects, this initiative had objectives similar to those pursued by Playfair, that is, "to allow for the transfer of knowledge and insight between areas, even if imperfectly" (Rzhetsky and Evans 2011:3). The same period saw the development of purely visual international systems of communication. This effort culminated in Australian theorist E. K. Bliss's (1965) "Semantography," a language of over 10,000 symbols. Mid-twentieth-century universal languages had their own dictionaries, grammar (Bonsiepe 1965) and linguists (e.g., Bertin 1983). However, the system movement, as it became known, only took root in the field of transportation where today, regardless of cultural context or geographical location, internationally consistent symbols enable motorists to comprehend rapidly basic driving advice and regulations.

The most influential of the twentieth-century efforts to systematize visual representation of data is the *Wiener Methode der Bildstatistik* (Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics), the brainchild of Otto Neurath of the New College of Commerce, Vienna and founder-director of the city's Museum of

Society and Economy. Neurath was an influential member of the Vienna Circle, a group of philosophers of science and philosophically literate scientists active from 1924 to 1936. After World War I, these thinkers sought to help people consider rationally social and economic problems and spot reasoning errors in ideological fanaticism. They are mostly remembered for developing a philosophical movement known as logical positivism, which in their view was an improvement on Auguste Comte's "classic" positivism. From Comte, they retained a belief in verifiable (empirical) facts, the affirmation of the fact-value distinction, the conviction that all sciences must follow a unique method and a general confidence in the ability of science to guide social progress (Joullié and Spillane 2015:121-124; Kolakowski 1969:169-200).

The Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics was faithful to the Vienna Circle's agenda. It succeeded in its central purpose to make scientific statistics (as opposed to data) accessible to lay audiences. At its heart was International System of TYpographic Picture Education (ISOTYPE). ISOTYPE invoked a set of hundreds of standardized pictorial symbols (such as those appearing on toilet doors or street signs) to represent social and technical data with guidelines on how to combine them using serial repetition. These symbols, mostly designed in 1936 by Rudolf Modley, Neurath's assistant, were abstracted but nonetheless natural or quasi-natural (Bresnahan 2011:9; Modley 1938). Natural signs, often referred to as "icons," embody an intuitive ("natural") relation to a signified entity (Nöth 2001). For example, non-text-based road signs are typically natural symbols, whereas abstracted signs, such as national flags, are pure symbols that exert their communicative power by agreement.

Neurath's view was that symbols, either natural or abstracted, have to be self-evident in their meaning. His objective was "a system of optical representation [. . .] that would be universal, immediate and memorable [ensuring] that even passers-by [. . .] acquaint themselves with the latest sociological and economical facts at a glance" (Neurath, quoted in Cartwright et al. 1996:65; see also Neurath 2010, 1936:32-33). Improving graphical effectiveness was only part of the point, however. Neurath was an early exponent of the view that quantity, or scale, should be represented by symbol frequency: for example, a collection of eight "man" icons represented 8 or 80 or 800 people, while four represents half that number (see Figure 2). In Neurath's view, adjustable-sized pictograms are ambiguous. When looking at them it is unclear, for example, whether the height or the area of the icon portrays differences in the scale of the represented entity or in its number.
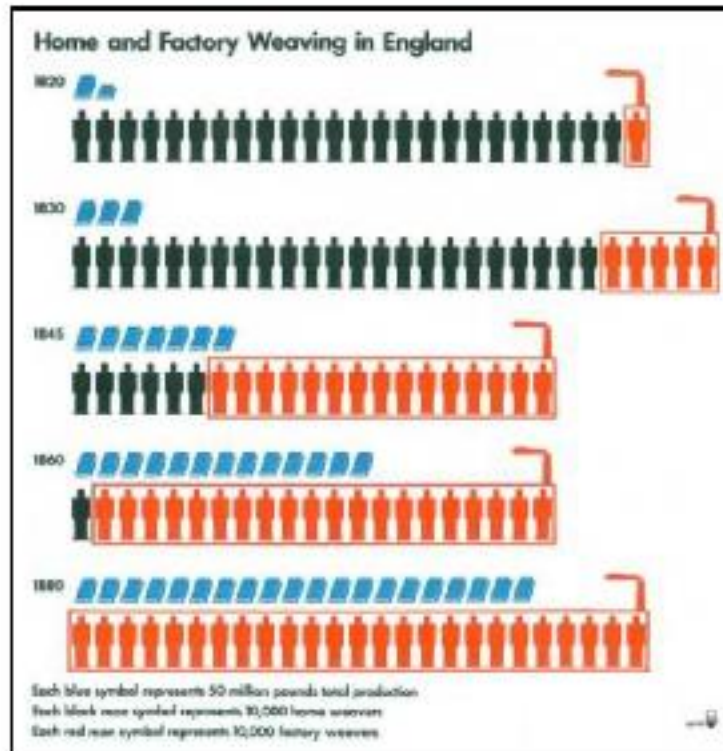
Figure 2. International System of TYpographic Picture Education chart from Neurath's (1939) *Modern Man in the Making.*

Aside from using frequency rather than scale to represent relative magnitude, ISOTYPE adopted other conventions. For example, displays had to read like a book, from top left to bottom right (Uebel 1991:227). When representing geosocial distributions, icons had to be arranged in ways that suggest, or be compatible with, a map (Neurath 2010:81-82). Neurath also insisted that complex facts be transformed into pictures that told a 'story' in a holistic and intuitive manner. However, somewhat like storytelling in the literature-based sense of the term, he argued that where diagrams are deployed, they should disclose only one overarching narrative or theme. The influence of logical positivism's taken-for-granted existence of observable, verifiable facts and of its Viennese advocates' overall desire to improve

society through the objectification of social and economic problems is manifest in ISOTYPE's conventions.

One of Neurath's legacies has been increasingly sophisticated graphics (Holmes 1984, 1993). Surprisingly, however, his influence on the scientific and nonscientific presentation of data and statistics has remained largely unrecognized. This is presumably because most of his work on the Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics remained untranslated into English, even if occasional commentary about the technique has appeared in scholarly literature (Kinross 1981; Neurath and Kinross 2009). The recent translation of Neurath's (2010) "visual autobiography" assists to remedy this neglect (Cat and Tuboly 2019).

Concept Mapping

Concept mapping as a formal technique of representation was developed at Cornell University by a team headed by physical scientist Joseph Novak (1990) and psychologist William Trochim (1989). Novak and Trochim's guiding principle was that pictures or maps should be used to represent relationships between ideas. Initially meant to help capture the evolving science-related knowledge of journeyman students, concept mapping has spread into fields as disparate as social psychology (Lord et al. 1994), environmental science (Barney, Mintzes and Yen 2005), business management (e.g., Kolb and Shepherd 1997) and sociology (Trepagnier 2002).

Concept mapping has its theoretical origins in constructivism (Novak 2009). As opposed to positivist epistemology, constructivist epistemology holds that (scientific) knowledge is socially constructed, that is, emerges from a body of conventions, rules, paradigms and values themselves embedded in (and contingent on) social and historical contexts. In the constructivist view, meaning is self-referent because it is recursively created by individuals drawing on their experience (Novak 2009). In this sense, concept mapping has a "family resemblance" (to reuse Rosch and Mervis's [1975] expression; see also Medin, Wattenmaker and Hampson 1987) with "visual thinking," the methodology pioneered by Stanford University's Robert McKim (1972, 1980). According to McKim, visual thinking is effective as a reflective problem-solving tool rather than a pure representation technique.

Concept mapping offers a semistructured visual representation of findings, albeit one less constrained than the traditional graph or table. A defining difference between the graph and the concept map is that, rather than merely representing abstracted findings delimited by two-dimensions, concept maps are not primarily meant to be as reflective of nature as graphs. Rather, they

offer the flexibility to depict, or speculate about, dissimilar kinds of variable associations (e.g., causation, correlation, mediated relationships; Kinchin, Hay and Adams 2000; Novak 2009). In preparing concept maps, ideas have to be generated and the relationships between them articulated, a process that has been compared to the conceptual stage of structural equation modeling (Trochim 1989:1).

Concept maps invariably go beyond being merely representative of a data set in either complete (such as columns of numbers) or summarized form (such as means or standard deviations; Novak 2009). Hence, unlike ISOTYPE presentations, they are not purely and only ways of displaying research findings. Rather, concept mapping is a research technique as much as, if not more than, it is an approach to display. Indeed, Davies (2011) concluded that they are a means of crystallizing or representing ideas as opposed to merely presenting data to make points (Kinchin, Möllits and Reiska 2019).

Insofar as producing concept maps is concerned, in the early stages of analysis (prior to the use of software), the process often leverages group creativity and lay or expert interpretation. However, studies have questioned whether concept maps can be intuitively interpreted by anyone other than those involved in their creation (Brumby 1983; Kolb and Shepherd 1997; Turns, Atman and Adams 2000). Theorists such as Trochim (1989) have taken up this point when arguing that, if concept mapping were a credible scientific procedure (as opposed to a process designed to explore and represent knowledge), it would have initiated theoretical advances. However, such an innovation has yet to materialize. Moreover, at least insofar as a strictly positivist understanding of the scientific method is concerned (i.e., observations, hypotheses, predictions, experiments, verifications, etc.), the free-wheeling process of creating maps cannot be easily reconciled with the prescriptive and iterative sequence that is integral to the hypothetico-deductive approach (Kalleberg 2016). Consequently, once again at least from a narrowly positivist perspective, concept mapping is endemically at risk of not embodying characteristics that are often associated with the "doing of science" such as being replicable, verifiable (or at least falsifiable), based solely on amassed empirical (sense-based) data and subject to peer review.

In spite of its shortcomings, concept mapping has key advantages. For example, it has potential to attenuate the problem of "meandering" from observation to inference (Kinchin, Möllits and Reiska 2019; Novak 2009). This is so because as noted, at least in group contexts, the technique draws on the inherent statistical stability of multiple perspectives emerging from the same set of underlying data. In this latter sense, it is more easily classified as an instantiation of science and scientific protocols in that it is reconcilable
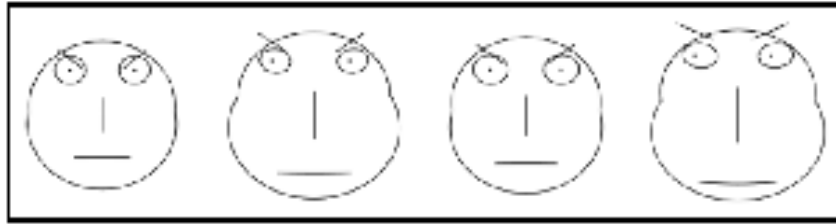
Figure 3. An example of Chernoff's clustered icons (faces).

with the Aristotelian classical model that embraces elementary forms of reasoning as well as compound forms (such as reasoning by analogy, the elements of which have parallels to concept mapping).

Clustered Representations

Clustering of data into more or less similar visual objects is typically used in data mining scenarios involving management and work-related phenomena (Berkhin 2006). The technique has been deployed most notably by Chernoff (1973) and more recently De Soete (1986), who each used a rich preexisting schemata (the human face) to showcase variables. For example, it is possible to package state crime rates in a single human face depiction, with the overall height representing murder rate and the width of the eyes representing the relative rate of aggravated assault (see Figure 3). De Soete (1986:549) argues that faces offer viewers a package where "phenomena that would be noticed less easily when the data were presented in tabular form [and] serve as mnemonic device [as well as] a straightforward means for communicating results to others." The technique assumes that parallel delivery of data in an easy-to-comprehend format facilitates users remembering a set of results. It also seeks to empower viewers to conduct their own informal and spontaneous calculations.

Chernoff never claimed to break new ground in development of clustered representation techniques. Rather, more modestly, he asserted that "instead of using machines to discriminate between human faces by reducing them to numbers, [I] discriminate between numbers by using the machine to do the brute labor of drawing faces and leave [. . .] the intelligence to humans, who are [. . .] more flexible and clever" (Chernoff 1973:18-19). In modern parlance, Chernoff wanted the viewer to engage in sense-making (Langley 1999; Raciborski 2009). Such reader involvement in data-processing exists also with descriptive matrices. Indeed, such matrices display raw data that

"both force and support analysis" where "local contexts are seen holistically, not lost in dispersed narrative" (Miles and Huberman 1984:26).

Research addressing the efficacy of Chernoff's faces has mostly failed to confirm his hypotheses concerning intuitive and spontaneous simultaneous viewer interpretive integration of multiple data sets and intuitive viewer interrogation of data (Raciborski 2009). Rather, there is evidence that humans are less adapted to appreciating the multiple variables contained in a face than Chernoff hoped would be the case. For example, Morris, Ebert and Rheingans (2000) have shown that features of Chernoff's faces were not "pre-attentive"; that is, they did not lend themselves to the supposed rapid delivery of multiple variables offered by data packaged in such an image. Notwithstanding such findings, derivatives of the Chernoff technique which depart from the face idea and rely on stars, circles, stick features, or glyphs are more easily and obviously decipherable (Ward, Patterson and Sifonis 2004). When they are successful, these approaches have in common an intuitive relationship between characteristics of underlying variables and the represented image. Hence, Chernoff's faces techniques are likely to be useful in a restricted range of contexts, specifically those which present data from a cluster of variables associated with human physiognomy.

Limitations of Visual Display Techniques

Multivariate visual displays are widely regarded as being in their relative infancy (Hurley 2004; MacKay and Villarreal 1987). As such, they are often relegated to being an unsophisticated illustrative cousin to "real" analysis (Tufte 1997, 2007). Visual displays are however, even at this stage, sophisticated enough for there to be a measure of consensus concerning how they should be deployed optimally. On this matter, Edward Tufte, the modern father of visual displays and author of *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* (1983, 1990, 1997, 2006), captured the middle ground. In Tufte's (1983:51) words:

> Graphical excellence is a matter of substance, of statistics and of design. It consists of complex idea communicated with clarity, precision and efficiency. It is that which gives to the viewer the greatest number of ideas in the shortest time with the least ink in the shortest space [...]. It is nearly always multivariate [...]. And graphical excellence requires telling the truth about the data.

Later in the same seminal work, Tufte lamented the deficiencies of visual display techniques. Indeed, he gave a summary of their generic limitations, as indubitable as his subsequent critiques (e.g., 1990, 1997 and 2007) and as relevant in 2019 as it was in 1983. Tufte (1983:177) is worth quoting once again:

> They (graphical displays) can be described and admired but there are no compositional principles on how to create that one wonderful graphic in a million. [The] best one can do for more routine workday designs is suggest some guidelines such as: have a properly chosen format and design; use words number and drawings together; display an accessible complexity of detail and avoid content-free decoration and chart-junk.

In this section, three of the more obstinate shortcomings of graphical display techniques are examined: the limited-number-of-variables problem, the nature-of-the-relationship problem and the problem of representing the significance of a relationship or effect size.

The Limited Number of Variables Problem

With the exception of concept maps and charts that illustrate interactions (for instance moderating or mediating effects) but which do not present data, visual devices have typically struggled to present relationships between more than two variables. Although it is possible to find examples of graphic techniques which wrestle with three four or even five variables, in such cases, the displays are often not easily decipherable. A case in point is the Cartesian-based double-X, Y graph. This strategy depicts three variables, two of which are routinely established as independent and one as dependent. Owing to their enhanced complexity when compared with the X–Y plane, such graphics are typically difficult to read, can be used to mislead, or are ambiguous (Wainer 2000; Wheelan 2013).

Like Cartesian displays, ISOTYPE presentations are mostly unable to depict multiple variables or, more technically, lose their potency in exponential proportion to the number of dimensions added (Lupton 1986). This limitation is present in Figure 2, which graphically configures four variables: (1) year of production, (2) pounds of production (measured in batches of 50 million), (3) number of home-based weavers (with each black man representing 10,000) and (4) number of factory-based weavers (with each gray man representing 10,000). The image is moderately successful in conveying its message because the last two variables are closely related conceptually. Hence, it is possible to appreciate readily the two main points the author is

making. First, there is a phasing out of home-based weaving throughout the nineteenth century. Second, there is an uptick in weaving output over the same time frame. However, consider the hypothetical case where home-based production was not replaced by factory workers but by machines. Such a state would necessitate that the gray men be exchanged with images of (say) stylized steam engines. There would still be four variables being presented in the image, but there would also be more conceptual distance between the last two and it would be slightly more difficult to "see" its key points. A further degradation in intelligibility would ensue if a fifth variable was added. Consider, for example, the case where each "year-row-set" was not associated only with measures of output and "weaver location" variables but also stylized images of hamburgers, each of which was intended to portray total caloric intake for the weaving workforce for the years in question. If this were to be done, it would take a reader longer to appreciate each of the diagram's central messages. This kind of thought experiment unearths a trade-off: the more points made, the greater processing time and resources required. In practice, processing becomes near impossible beyond a limited number of variables, a generic preoccupation of information processing theorists (Siew, McCartney and Vitevitch 2019).

Related to the problem of limitations in variable number is a similar challenge, well embodied in literature (e.g., Wheelan 2013) concerning value labels. The case of one nominal variable, the most basic descriptive scenario, illustrates this dilemma. Suppose a researcher wanted to illustrate using a graphic device the relative frequencies of different kinds of fruit that are grown commercially in the State of Florida. A pie chart does this job fairly well; however, according to some (e.g., Wainer 2000), a histogram would suit the purpose even better. The task is manageable if there are five, six, or seven fruit in the universe (Florida) of items to be represented. At some point, however, the number of variable value labels in a set imposes a burdensome strain on the graphical technique. This difficulty does not necessarily affect the spatial capacity of the approach to handle the case load but does diminish the technique's utility. Put more simply, visual display devices are often perfectly capable of accommodating a large number of value labels; however, beyond a certain limit, they cease to do their real job, which is to make a point about what needs attention.

Insofar as concept maps are concerned, as noted, it is debatable whether such techniques really count as examples of approaches to data display. Regardless, as is evident in Figure 3, although concept maps are effective at handling several variables, from an end-user perspective, they remain liable to being ambiguous.

The Nature of the Relationship Problem

With the exception of concept maps, visual techniques do not easily represent the nature of a relationship between the variables they depict. Indeed, they do not necessarily even have face validity in the sense that they do not intuitively show how focal variables are connected. This shortcoming is usually overcome using convention. For example, when doing research in the social sciences, analysts will normally have a hypothesis about cause and effect (Dumez 2013) and design a study (for instance a field or natural experiment) to test their suspicion about the natural order. In presenting their data pictorially, they often use a graph to plot the cause (independent variable) on the x-axis and the effect (dependent variable) on the y-axis. The American Psychological Association's (1994:56) guidelines are prescriptive on this point: "Use the X-axis to plot value labels for the independent variable. Use the Y-axis to plot value labels for the dependent variable. Place headings on each axis accordingly." This counsel, offered without rationale, is a thinly veiled admission that there is nothing inherent in Cartesian techniques requiring, for reasons of logic, that axes be used in the way that has become orthodox.

Although to a lesser extent than Cartesian techniques, ISOTYPE displays rely on convention to imply causation or, at least, suggest a temporal or spatial ordering of events. Figure 2 indicates how such convention typically operates. In relation to this graphic, one may ask: is the year "causally prior" to output levels or weaving locations? The figure implies that it is. If the graphic had put output where each year is depicted and a horizontal bar representing reference year where output data are currently presented, it would have conveyed a different (and somewhat bizarre) message.[2] The change would come about because convention prescribes that, in a situation where there is one putative causal variable and several putative effects variables, the causal element be separated from its effects.

Concept maps are adapted to showing relationships between variables as perceived by the researcher and to stimulating the viewer in imagining new relationships (Davies 2011; Novak 2009). In this sense, they are unlike most other visual display methods and perhaps do not really count as examples of data presentation techniques (or, as discussed, an instantiation of science and scientific protocols when seen from a narrow perspective). Furthermore, like the other approaches considered and owing largely to the number of variables dilemma, concept maps sometimes become overwhelming visually which limits their third-party/end-user consumption (Davies 2011).

The Significance of the Relationship/Size of Effect Problem

Visual display techniques are poorly adapted to demonstrating statistical significance. It is of course possible to augment elements of an image to show statistical significance. Indeed, this is routinely done through using, for example, asterisks besides bars (value labels often depicting frequencies) on Cartesian-based portrayals (Wainer 2000; Wheelan 2013). Such augmentations rest (and must rest) on independent statistical analysis, the output of which is then combined with the graphical device. In this sense, the visual presentation is not a substitute for statistical manipulation but rather supplemental in nature, used to make a point. Besides, although this possibility is rarely embraced, visual displays such as Chernoff's faces arrays provide opportunity to show an effect size but are poorly adapted for demonstrating statistical significance. However, there are exceptions. For example, using specified conventions—perhaps a cross-eyed effect and so on—a difference that is statistically significant but of negligible magnitude can be made apparent in such displays.

Clustered Iconography

According to Tufte (1983, 1990, 1997, 2007), the most compelling visual display ever produced was a representation of Napoleon's march on and retreat from Moscow, rendered in 1869 by Charles Joseph Minard (reproduced in Figure 4). This depiction reconciles six variables: army size, army location on two-dimensions, trajectory of army movement and daily temperature during the retreat. The image is read and absorbed effortlessly. Perhaps this is mostly so because there is something of the quintessential picture about Minard's rendering. As such, it (at least partially) concretizes the abstract under the influence of privately understood, but nonetheless generic, principles. For present purposes, the image appears to resolve unselfconsciously the aforementioned three problems of graphical display while handling dimensions that are neither intuitively associated or within the average viewer's realm of daily experience.

In his own ways, Minard was an artist. Unfortunately, he left no instructions concerning how to produce similar graphics for other phenomena. As a result, the viewer is left both in awe and frustrated at not being able to borrow the patent. The beguiling questions are, how did Minard decide what variables are consequential? Did he have *a-priori* principles for juxtaposing these? If so, what were they? How did they become the principles? (i.e., what meta principles were in play?). Although answers are elusive, it is

Figure 4. A representation of Napoleon's march on and retreat from Moscow (Minard [1869] from Tufte 1983).

19

noncontroversial to conclude that the work itself is a very different kind of rendering to that which typically gets used by contemporary sociologists to represent multivariate results. Indeed, Tufte (1983, 1990, 1997, 2007), in marveling at Minard's handiwork, bemoaned such a paucity of adventurism, noting that the modern social scientist rarely gets beyond scatterplots or bar plots, often producing an image that takes too long to process while delivering underwhelming substance.

The approach to be presented in the current article for displaying visual knowledge—clustered iconography—is inspired by a hard and detailed look at Minard's image. As such it represents an attempt to pin-down those elusive principles that guided Minard's design. From a more technical perspective, the proposed approach offers a partial remedy to several of the problems associated with established techniques, summarized earlier as boiling down to three generic problems. In making progress with each of these, the new method also breaks free from the aforementioned trade-off dilemma that was described in the historical survey of graphical techniques (i.e., that removal of one problem is associated with emergence of another). Indeed, clustered iconography incorporates the notion that visual data display act as a trigger for ideas and facilitate an understanding of relationships between variables. It also conveys the (statistical) significance of those relationships. More specifically, the new approach addresses a key weakness of Chernoff's construct, his overly optimistic assumption that humans undertake "natural" analysis of data when it is encoded in a face (Raciborski 2009). With respect to this hypothesis, Chernoff failed to embrace a key edict of the Vienna method: Graphical depictions must have an intuitive relationship with what they represent if they are to be effective. This principle is at the heart of clustered iconography.

In addition to drawing on aspects of Chernoff's approach and conventions borrowed from the Vienna Method, clustered iconography relies on orthodox Cartesian geometry and mathematical principles. What emerges is a data presentation technique deploying four key doctrines, three of which derive from its predecessors in the field of visual statistics. It is to these doctrines that the discussion now turns.

Natural Signs

Unlike traditional concept mapping and especially Chernoff's faces, clustered iconography makes use of 'natural signs' wherever possible. That is, clustered iconography relies on visual representations when these are intuitively associated with the represented construct. This feature is indebted to

the ISOTYPE lexicon of symbols that were established to enable rapid uptake of a key message. An emphasis on the representative value of an image puts clustered iconography somewhat close to the Vienna Method and as such a solution to one of the key problems of the Chernoff conceptualization. However, unlike ISOTYPE, clustered iconography does not demand that the symbol and the symbolized be associated in a manner that is immediately apparent. Rather, the clustered iconographic designer should balance symbol fidelity with pragmatism in achieving intelligible clusters.

Clustering

To facilitate grouping, clustered iconography does not adhere strictly to true iconic representation. More particularly, the new approach violates the first rule of ISOTYPE, which states that variation in scale (e.g., frequency or size) should be represented by repeated pictograms rather than proportionally larger or small images. As mentioned, Neurath considered use of scale to represent quantitative differences as potentially creating ambiguity because it leaves readers unsure whether to choose icon height or surface area as an indicator of relative magnitude. Abandoning this principle, however fraught or valid, creates a key difference between clustered iconography and its predecessor techniques. Specifically, it permits the new approach to depict multiple variables. Clustered iconography aims to display not one or two (as in the case of ISOTYPE and concept mapping, if to a lesser extent) or three (Cartesian geometry) but multiple variables in a single combined pictogram. It also allows for the illustration of several relationships at once, although in a less direct manner than, say, Cartesian geometry.

A central principle of ISOTYPE displays was the presentation of a single theme, even though many of Neurath's diagrams inhered more than one variable. In a clustered iconography display, each clustered icon represents one data source, whether a single identifiable group such as an organization or family, or an individual (see, e.g., Figure 5). In adding variables to a clustered icon, the designer balances the risk of exacerbating viewer confusion with that of foregoing one of the key advantages of clustered iconography, empowering at the same time the reader to take an active role in data interpretation in a manner not dissimilar to that of concept maps. However, in addition to its ability to handle variable case load, clustered iconography disengages from the constructivist philosophy of concept mapping which uses maps or pictures to enable a researcher to speculate about reality (Novak 2009). Rather, the new method allows greater and more disciplined
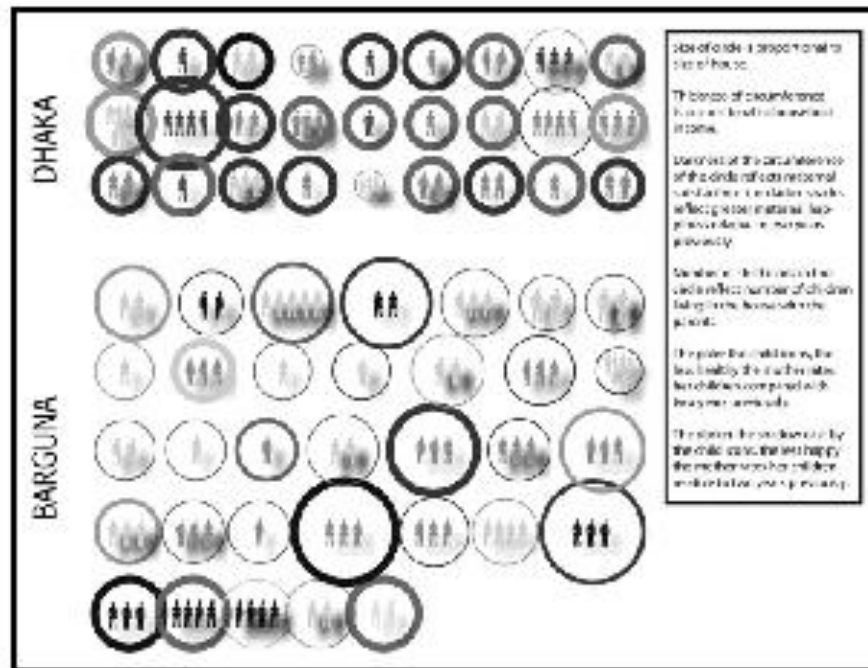
Figure 5. Family units presented in a clustered iconography format, with each circle "containing" a cluster of variables (Muurlink and Islam 2010).

engagement with raw data. Unlike concept mapping, it establishes the audience, as opposed to the creators, as the central interpretive actor.

When handling data obtained using ratio-measure scales (i.e., those with a zero-point), current standards oblige social science researchers to reveal, at a minimum, descriptive sample statistics (e.g., American Psychological Association 1994). Clustered iconography is compatible with such disclosure but places emphasis on the display of variables grouped on a case-by-case basis. For example, a corporation, a number of employees or a management structure appears as a single, compact semiotic cluster.

Figure 5 presents a clustered iconographic format to represent 60 urban (Dhaka) and rural (Barguna) Bangladeshi families (Muurlink and Islam 2010). In this graphic, several household characteristics are summarized in a single iconic cluster: (1) house size (represented by the size of the enclosing circle), (2) family income (represented by the thickness of the circle circumference), (3) child numbers (represented by the number of human icons within the circle), (4) child physical and mental health and (5) maternal life satisfaction. The study explores the consequences of displacement of
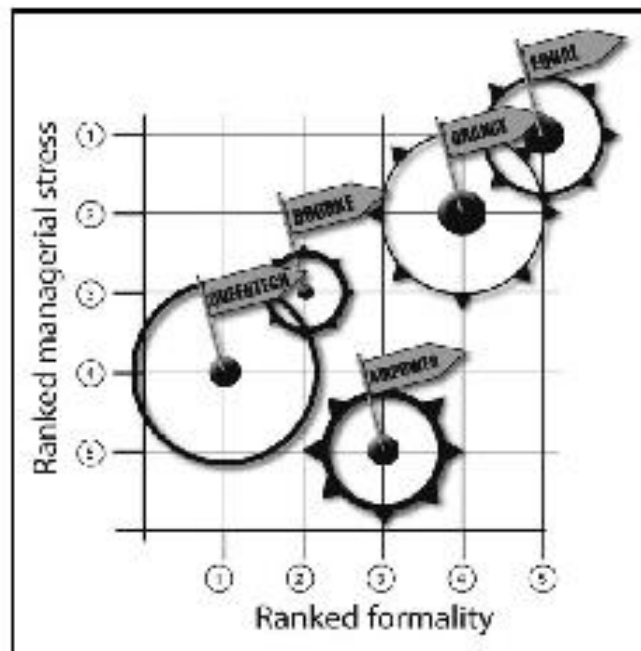
Figure 6. A clustered iconographic chart representing the relationship between managerial stress and policy adherence in a group of five companies on two axes. The icons simultaneously express the size of company (reflected by the size of circles) and core management team (the thickness of the "axle" around which the companies pivot), profitability (the thickness of the circumference) and growth (the size of the spurs; Muurlink et al. 2012).

populations from coastal regions such as Barguna to the slums of Dhaka. Using the figure's simultaneous presentation of massed data images rather than summary statistics, the viewer is encouraged to conduct proto-statistical procedures. The key points are relatively easy to appreciate: Dhaka households are smaller, richer and have more satisfied matriarchs than Barguna households.

Spatial Distribution of Icons

Clustered iconography reintroduces axes of the Cartesian graph or other forms of spatial distribution of clusters. By restoring a plain-based coordinate system to visual statistical representations (as in Figure 6), two concepts out of three or more are foregrounded in a familiar two-dimensional depiction.

This advantage is achieved because a Cartesian grid enables clustered icons to be positioned along two dimensions, with distances represented proportionally (this Cartesian display is optional and contingent on actual data; other systems of spatial distribution of clustered icons are possible). Such familiar geographical 'maps' are intuitive and lend themselves naturally to research employing global positioning system or geographic information system technology. Presenting clustered icons on maps allows the telling of research stories in a way that using statistics derived from the general linear model cannot achieve. It also allows for the simultaneous showcasing of variables from dissimilar scales of measure including nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio. In this latter respect, it is sufficiently versatile to handle multimethod derived results and thus respond sensitively to Goering and Streiner's (2013) aforementioned qualitative/quantitative "reconcilable differences" dilemma.

Ranking

While eliminating the rule of proportionality in presenting ISOTYPE symbols, clustered iconography, notwithstanding its versatility, is better adapted for categorical, ranked, or ordinal relationships than it is for interval or ratio relationships.[3] By combining ranked and categorical variables, the new method preserves the reflective nature of concept mapping. However, it also allows interrater agreement to converge, even in qualitative research. Reducing ambiguity in this way forms part of a strategy described by Guttman (1944) as the "quantification" of qualitative data (see also Van de Ven and Poole 1990). Using ranking to structure data does not require stringent assumptions about a data set aside from the presupposition that elements are ordinal (Guttman 1944; Siegel 1957).

Ranking partially assuages Neurath's (1936) concern about the ambiguous nature of scaled icons. Specifically, the clustered iconographic approach makes fewer assumptions about absolute values and more about relative values, with absolute values being sacrificed to allow more compact depiction of multiple variables. However, where researchers have access to quantitative ratio or interval data, they can choose to use clustered items that preserve proportionality in their expression (as is done in Figure 5, where income and house size were conceived of and operationalised as a continuous variable and represented proportionally).

Figure 6 presents an example of a clustered iconographic chart depicting management-related data using ranking based on interval or ratio-scaled variables (Muurlink et al. 2012). The project drew on five case studies of

companies, with aliases Queentech, Bourke, Airpower, Orange and Equal. Absolute rather than ranked data were available for the size of the firms, with such sizes being measured through employee number (expressed in area of the circle) to represent proportionally the size of the firms in the study. The absolute size of the management team is indicated by the size of the pivot of each circle/icon. Lastly, the axes represent the two focal variables, managerial stress and degree of policy formality.

Figure 5 bears resemblance to portfolio matrices that became popular in the 1980s (e.g., Hambrick, MacMillan and Day 1982; Marrus 1984), in that it features iconic and contextualized summaries of firms. However, unlike portfolio matrices, clustered iconography is able to depict multiple variables of a single firm captured in one cluster, with the possibility of an open-ended number of clusters to show interorganizational trends as well as unique intra-organizational characteristics.

While the Muurlink et al. (2012) research adhered to the conventions of a qualitative case study (e.g., Yin 2009), the use of clustered icons allows quantitative and qualitative elements to be integrated into a single graphical representation. For example, the representation shown in Figure 5 suggests a relationship between formality and stress, a finding that animates the article's central message. The graphic allows for other putative causal relationships to be largely discounted. If such diagrams are presented as a series, with variables added one or two at a time, it is possible to build illustrations that represent a holistic picture of the entity (in this case a firm) without betraying the identity of the individual entity. A further advantage of clustered iconographic charts revealed in this example is that they allow for fine-grained presentation of data while preserving the anonymity of individual cases.

Design Guidelines and Advantages; Limitations of Clustered Iconography

One way to assess the value of clustered iconography is to examine whether the method (a) represents progress in the quest to resolve the three key problems presented earlier[4] and (b) does not come with limitations that offset its benefits.

Design Guidelines

With or without the help of a software, the thorniest challenge when using clustered iconography remains the creation of the chart. A handful of general principles will help simplify the task. These principles, presented in Table 1,

Table 1. Generic Principles for Creating Clustered Iconographic Charts.

Principle
i) With small data sets, researchers assemble the variables they wish to highlight into a grid using, for example, standard spreadsheet software. Aspects of the cases conceptualized as rankings are converted at this early stage.
ii) Choose variables (if any) to be foregrounded in the charting process and decide whether (as in Figure 4) to divide the clustered icons into two or more groups to illustrate differences. The variable chosen to enclose or cluster icons should be focal in making such a judgment.
iii) Characteristics of the icons should be chosen based on an apparent intuitive relationship that they have with a referent (in Figure 4, growth is represented by spurs or arrows). As in Figures 5 and 6, their size should correspond to the relative size of the represented entity. By grouping the icons in clusters, it is possible easily to shift them on the background (whether axes or groupings) at a final stage to illustrate different aspects of the results.
iv) With larger data sets, clustered iconography designers can choose from among several ways to reduce the data to manageable proportions; for example, they could use a randomly selected subset, group summary data, or use icons from extreme and mean cases.

are not associated rigidly with a correct order (linear sequence) and hence not numbered.

Advantages

Insofar as issue (a) is concerned, clustered iconography partially resolves the more persistent problems of traditional visual display techniques. It offers researchers a means of showcasing multiple variables in a single two-dimensional representation, making use of relationships that are either intuitively familiar (through the use of icons) or familiar by virtue of widespread convention.

In contrast to some of its predecessors, clustered iconography is not formulaic. Rather, like concept mapping, it prescribes no "right" way for chart creation and indeed cannot do so on the grounds of logical entailment. Instead, it offers guiding principles, summarized in Table 1. These include using icons with characteristics intuitively linked to what is being represented; established clusters to represent single organisms, organizations, or groups; and optionally using ranking and spatial arrangement to enhance either the number of variables represented or the relationship between what clusters represent.

Another area where clustered iconography represents an advance over traditional graphical display techniques is that it facilitates transparency in results presentation. For example, it allows the reader to drill into individual cases and generate alternate hypotheses while enabling the authors to retain control of the points they are making. The method is also well aligned with the philosophy that underpins the open-data, open-science, open-knowledge movements (e.g., "European Countries" 2018; Ibanez, Schroeder and Hanwell 2014; Molloy 2011) because it encourages publication of raw, or nearly raw, data in a meaningful way rather than following statistical transformation. This advantage has special import in the contemporary Western public policy context where there is an emerging imperative to open-up publicly funded research to broader scrutiny (Eisenberg and Nelson 2002; "European Countries" 2018). It is also noteworthy that, at least in the United Kingdom, the issue of accessibility impacts grant money allocation decisions (Suber 2012).

Publishing data, in "raw" rather than "processed" form using clustered iconography allows inclusion of outliers in a manner that does not bias analysis. As Langley (1999:707) put it in commenting on the importance of enabling a with/without analysis of entities, "variety contributes to richness." In practice, an outlier in a graphic display can be either included in or eliminated from interpretation. Clustered iconography allows extremes to be compared, removing, for example, an exclusive focus on orthodox measures of central tendency. In this, the method allows the representation of both patterns and exceptions from these patterns.

By presenting structured charts of massed clustered data, the clustered iconographic chart viewer is encouraged to conduct simple statistical procedures. Hence, the technique makes progress in the quest to devise a visual device that allows some insight into issues of statistical significance and effect size. Tufte (2007:127) argued that pictorial displays should draw attention to comparisons only "if they (such comparisons) are to assist thinking." In that regard, the use, in clustered iconography, of axes or other forms of spatial arrangement to establish two or more variables as focal is visually suggestive of causation. Indeed, because clustered iconography draws on one of the strengths of concept mapping (the notion that maps should act as a trigger for ideas), the method represents the best that traditional visual techniques have to offer in showing variable association.

Insofar as the aforementioned issue (b) is concerned—whether limitations overwhelm the advantages of a technique—the problems associated with clustered iconography do not so much represent new dilemmas but rather scaled-down versions of old ones. For example, aside from technical

difficulties associated with creating a clustered iconographic chart, those producing such illustrations need to wrestle with too many data clusters to present on an A4 or Letter page, the format typically used. However, the extent of this limitation should be evaluated in a relative sense via a process of comparison with rival visual techniques. Indeed, all conventional procedures ultimately reach the point of diminishing returns when variable number, value labels and data points exceed thresholds, which are in practice often low.

Limitations

Clustered iconography diagrams have limits on how many data points they can handle. As alluded to earlier, these are largely imposed by the size of a page. Beyond a certain threshold, descriptive sample statistics such as means and standard deviations become necessary. It remains nevertheless the case that, while the new method is ideal for illustrating smaller data sets, it is also true that icons created from aggregated data are able to handle larger caseloads.

Although clustered iconographic illustrations can appear overly 'busy' or burdensome, they do give the researcher an opportunity to present a comprehensive overview of data in a single, relatively compact illustration. Whatever the case, it is surprising that the charge of 'busyness' is mostly leveled at visual techniques. Even though it is rarely done, the same concern can be raised about, for example, the outputs from multiple regression analyses. These techniques, representing the purist instantiation of the general linear model, also arose from a need to examine simultaneously several variables. For myriad reasons, they often generate confusing and somewhat opaque results (Wheelan 2013).

Organizations, groups, tribes, clubs and families are dynamic multidimensional entities. While clustered iconography addresses the need for a comprehensible, systematic and simultaneous representation of multiple variables, a two-dimensional static graphical representation will inevitably struggle to represent dynamism. The growth spurs presented on, for example, Figure 6's icons partially overcome the problem. With the advent of electronic journals, it is also conceivable that computer-aided visual data display use clustered iconography to capture dynamism in looped animated sequences. At the time of writing, however, no such software exists.[5]

Conclusion

In presenting and defending a new visual technique, this article has sought to enhance the comprehensibility of statistical information and address information anxiety. Clustered iconography supplements rather than replaces current research exposition conventions such as the presentation of means, standard errors and probability scores. While four factors (namely iconography, clustering of variables, use of Cartesian dimensions and ranking in presenting data) characterize clustered iconography charts, only two of these (clustering and use of icons) are fundamental to the technique. Indeed, the utility of the method derives in part from an absence of rules.

None of the characteristics of clustered iconography is unique to the technique, with Chernoff's faces and ISOTYPE being the most direct predecessors. This lineage means that clustered iconography has a "family resemblance" to graphs, concept maps and visual display languages. However, despite sharing characteristics with these techniques, the new approach is not a derivative of an existing representational method.

In common with Chernoff's faces, clustered iconographic displays bundle variables in a single icon. However, the technique uses both intuitive and nonfixed relationships between icons and referents as well as spatial distribution to enhance instinctive interpretation of complex patterns. Like concept maps and Chernoff's faces, the technique is more than a passive means for presenting ideas. Rather, it acts as a trigger for interpretation by the reader and potentially a pathway to independent analysis. As with graphs, clustered iconography relies on intuitive spatial distributions but is not as limited in the number of variables it can handle or otherwise restricted by only being able to present summative variables. Like visual display languages, clustered iconography presents massed, intuitive icons, but unlike visual display languages, it enables multiple variables to be presented. It can also present individual data points rather than summary statistics and in so doing encourages exploration of outlier cases, as well as contrasts between groups of cases.

In common with ISOTYPE, clustered iconography aims at presenting a 'natural' reality that is deemed to exist objectively. For instance, the method relies on vivid icons, the meaning of which is (ideally) transparent because the existence of what they stand for is not in doubt. In common with concept maps, however, clustered iconography also enables the visual representation of relationships between variables, not only as the researcher identified them but also as the end user of the display can imagine them. A degree of subjectivity is retained; whatever knowledge is contained in the display, it is

therefore neither fixed nor forced upon the reader. In this sense, clustered iconography is an attempt to bridge, visually if not philosophically, positivism and constructivism. The technique should therefore be especially appealing to social science researchers.

In the final analysis, clustered iconography provides researchers, particularly in social sciences, with a new option for illustrating relationships, be they range-dependent, nonlinear, or comprised of interactions between qualitative and quantitative entities. Research questions are rarely simple or able to be summed up as a relationship between two variables and a handful of value labels. Reality does not necessarily cooperate with the analytic tools at the researcher's disposal and intuitive representation of complexity is an ongoing challenge. Clustered iconography is neither a panacea for all that is wrong with visual displays nor a universal alternative to formulaic-based data analysis. Moreover, it is certainly not a ubiquitous and flawless substitute for statistical manipulation. Rather, clustered iconography is another weapon in an arsenal of techniques.

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Notes

1. Equivalent formal data on faculty familiarity with (and orientation towards) statistics-based techniques are remarkably absent.
2. Bizarre since the figure would have implied that output level 'cause' years to pass and causes weaving to shift from being home-based to being factory-based.
3. Interval or ratio variables assume that the difference between two values is comparable to the difference between two other values in the same set or that same-set

values can be divided and multiplied. Categorical variables, also called nominal variables, can be used for mutually exclusive, nonordered categories (e.g., man, woman). However, ranked or ordinal variables merely suggest that the order of values matter; but not that the magnitude of difference between the values is meaningful (e.g., big, bigger, biggest).

4. Revealed in this article's historical analysis as the residual unaddressed concerns that arose from the trade-offs of each successive new approach.

5. The advent of graphical software has in part sparked an explosion of interest in graphical display of multivariate findings (De Soete 1986) and created more options for presenting research findings (Uebel 1991). For example, packages do exist to create Chernoff's faces; in particular, a function of *R* software expedites face production.

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2.9 : Having nothing to say but saying it anyway: Language and practical relevance in management research

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Having Nothing to Say but Saying It Anyway: Language and Practical Relevance in Management Research

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Having Nothing to Say but Saying It Anyway: Language and Practical Relevance in Management Research[1]

Jean-Etienne Joullié and Anthony M. Gould

Abstract

This article investigates why management research which ostensibly embraces scientific protocols and is reported to be practically relevant is often not so. The implications for practice sections of elite management journals were reviewed and analysed as the basis for the study. The analytic-synthetic distinction, central to logical positivism and crucial to the reporting of the findings of science, but rarely applied within management academia, reveals that management researchers who commit to science, as logical positivists conceive of it, typically use language in a way that is not especially helpful for managers. Reasons explaining this state of affairs are explored and corrective measures proposed.

Since its inception in 2002, the *Academy of Management Learning and Education (AMLE)* and other leading management journals have devoted substantial and regular attention to the question of whether management research and instruction generate insights that are relevant to workplace practice (e.g., Bajwa, Konig & Harrison, 2016; Pearce & Huang, 2012; Baldwin *et al.*, 2011; Bartunek & Rynes, 2010; Goshal, 2005; Lloyd, Kern & Thompson, 2005). There are compelling reasons for this emphasis. Indeed, there is a problem which can be

straightforwardly expressed: in management scholarship, what are presented as practical recommendations (i.e., proposals for improved workplace practice) are often not as purported.

Concern about management researchers being poor at producing workplace ready findings is traceable to the seminal contribution of Porter and McKibbin (1988: 30). These authors, now over three decades ago, stated point-blank that research produced in business schools "was mostly not relevant to practice." A few years later, Hambrick (1994: 11) was similarly forthright in his denunciation, describing "a closed incestuous loop" existing within the academy, whereby producers of research are also its primary consumers. In making his case, he (Hambrick) stressed that the issue of practice and what managers should do in the workplace in light of a research finding or theory being advanced was often left unaddressed or dealt with disingenuously (i.e., through including implications for practice sections in articles without really being committed to presenting substantive content therein). Later in the 1990s, others for example, Aldag (1997) and Beyer (1997), voiced essentially the same unease. To address the problem of making research output more actionable, the *Academy of Management Journal*'s editor hosted a forum in 2007 (Rynes, 2007). The write-up of this exercise indicates that its insights were underwhelming. Moreover, empirical perspectives on the conundrum are similarly disheartening. For example, an especially disquieting finding comes from the pages of *AMLE* where Bartunek and Rynes (2010) presented data indicating that a mere 8% of the purported practical recommendations of management articles where actually helpful to managers. More recently, Pearce and Huang (2012) raised the spectre that the problem of producing actionable research had worsened. These authors indicated that the deteriorating situation is detectable on two dimensions. First, the number of actual recommendations for practice has declined. Second, authors are increasingly presenting conclusions as actionable when in fact they are not.

If a case can be made that the implications for practice sections of scholarly management journals do not deliver the goods, a second-order consideration is whether such malaise rises to the level of being a damning indictment of academia. Indeed, some have argued that the situation exists but is not as bad as it seems. For example, Martin (2012) asserts that there is value in research for research's sake and that partial practical relevance is better that none at all. He proposes that deemphasising actionable benefits leads to a desirable emphasis on consequential theoretical concerns. In the same vein, other commentators (e.g., Aldag, 2012), have questioned previous conclusions about the rising prevalence of unimplementable research output on methodological grounds, mostly arguing that the problem has been over-reported and misstated. However, despite such sanguine contributions, articles which either minimise the magnitude of the problem or seek to reframe it as not a dilemma unambiguously form the minority portion of relevant literature. Whatever the case concerning prevalence, most commentators view the mere presence of unactionable recommendations as objectionable and as a blight on management academia with alarm-raising commentaries tending to dominate the pages of AMLE in particular (e.g. Pearce & Huang, 2012). Indeed, in the 21st century within the management research community, it is near mainstream orthodoxy that production of findings relevant to practice forms the principal basis for researcher professional legitimacy, especially when scholarship is plainly trumpeted as solution-orientated (van Aken, 2004; Kaiser, et al, 2015). Some authors are especially candid about the matter. For example, Mintzberg (2004), Bazerman (2005), Bartunek and Rynes (2010) and Khurana and Spender (2012) point out (each in their own way) that if a research paper has within its pages an implications for practice section and the content of that section is not practically relevant, readers are justified in doubting an author's competence and even their integrity.

To summarise, literature casting aspersions on the quality of implications for practice sections in management journals indicates that the presence of such sections is evidence of the

mere paying of lip-service to the imperative that research be practically relevant. This concern, the lip-service problem, is the principal motivation for the current piece of research and its associated recommendations. Since this motivation is rooted in literature-based controversies, *ipso facto* such controversies will lessen if there is indication that researchers improve how they communicate about practical recommendations. Furthermore, if the quality of implications for practice sections of management journals is enhanced, working managers are likely to view those doing research about their profession with greater legitimacy. For them, working managers, the dilemma has a special import. Consider, for example, the crew supervisor at a busy fast-food outlet faced with the challenge of applying Hackman & Oldham's (1976) Job Characteristics Model (a motivation through job design theory) to the problem of encouraging a surly adolescent employee who wants to do counter work but not cleaning duty. To help the supervisor in this situation would be to supplant Hambrick's (1994) aforementioned "incestuous loop" (i.e. researchers only writing for their peers) with a productive cycle of benefit for a broader range of stakeholders. In a similar vein, it is axiomatic that making progress with the lip-service problem will provide researchers themselves additional rationale for perceiving what they do as worthwhile. This latter predicament, often framed as a matter concerning how to boost researcher self-confidence and enhance their professional self-perception has been raised as a separate and independent concern in *AMLE* and elsewhere (see, for example, Baldwin *et al*, 2011; Adler & Harzing, 2009; Hambrick, 2007; Carens, Conttrell & Layton, 2004).

This article examines an aspect of how the practical utility of management research is enhanced through precise language use. In taking up the cudgel laid down by Bartunek and Rynes (2010), it argues that such a focus reveals how to make a study's findings (as embodied in its implications for practice section) unambiguous and actionable. It invokes data to create a portrait of the current situation. The study's research question is: why is management research

which uses scientific protocols and is reported to be practical often not so? Here, the notion of scientific protocols is shorthand for logical positivist epistemology. More will be said about what it means to have a logical positivist epistemology and the role of such a framework's within the full corpus of management research prior to presenting a method for answering the question. The method to be presented (and used to generate data for the study) invokes a linguistic dichotomy, the analytic-synthetic distinction that, although often overlooked in social science, is in fact an integral element of logical-positivist epistemology.

Management research, language and the idea empirical content

According to the mission statements on their websites, leading scholarly management journals mostly have a similar epistemological emphasis. They also each typically embrace an overt commitment to publishing research which is relevant to managerial and workplace betterment (workplace practice). For example, the objective of the *Academy of Management Journal* (*AMJ*) is to publish articles that "test, extend, or build theory and contribute to management practice using a variety of empirical methods." Similarly, the website of *The Journal of Management* (*JoM*) reports that the periodical "is committed to publishing scholarly empirical and theoretical research articles that have a high impact on the management field as a whole," a sphere of concern which includes the practice of management. In these endeavours, *AMJ* and *JoM* do not distinguish themselves from other leading management journals such as the *European Management Review* (*EMR*) and *Asia-Pacific Journal of Management* (*APJoM*).

The aforementioned emphasis of management research indicates that editors of leading journals in the domain mostly seek to inscribe the research they publish within a logical positivist epistemology or scientific frame of reference as traditionally, if perhaps narrowly, conceived (Ghoshal, 2005). This focus has not been without its critics (e.g., Baden & Higgs, 2015). Whatever the case, logical positivism remains largely the orthodoxy for researchers and

teachers within business schools (Joullié, 2016).[2] Among its characteristics, such a framework includes a co-opting of the reasoning of natural science (inductive and deductive), a preoccupation with experimental protocols (such as natural or field experiments in lieu of their laboratory equivalent) and the frequent use of quantitative techniques for data analysis (Gauch, 2005). However, as this study demonstrates, to receive the advantages of science, at least as understood by logical positivists – one of which being practically relevant recommendations – a crucial element is necessary, namely the correct use of language.

It is noteworthy that, within management academia, knowledge and insight are derived from a spectrum of epistemological orientations. However, within the overall corpus, language has a particularised role to play for those embracing logical positivism (as noted, dominant within management research). Indeed, within this tradition, words and phraseology codify and delineate content according to set conventions (Shapira, 2011: 1315). Hence, for the researcher with such an orientation, producing knowledge that managers are able to readily implement in their work requires that it (the knowledge) be represented using language that carries unambiguous meaning and circumscribed application. As such, 'implications for practice' sections of these kinds of scholarly articles do their job when they contain propositions that, if implemented, have observable and predictable consequences. In this regard, a deft touch with language is as pressing a priority when communicating about research results for such projects as substantive elements of a message. Expressed differently, the worth of an 'implications for practice' section for articles which are reporting on studies that have derived their findings through embrace of the logical positivist epistemology is judged against two intertwined linguistic criteria. First, its language is unambiguous. Second, its language conveys a

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[2] The 1959 Ford Foundation report unambiguously equated enhanced professionalisation of management academia with the embrace of scientific protocols.

prescribed level of certainty about both the likelihood and magnitude of an effect in specified circumstances. Thus, within the logical positivist tradition, effective 'implications for practice' sections express the utility of a research finding using words and phraseology that make the empirical content of that finding apparent and unequivocal.

The idea of empirical content, insofar as the term is used in this study and associated with logical positivism, deserves further exposition. However, prior to delving into its meaning, a caveat is necessary: the construct, although relevant to much management research output, is not applicable to all projects with scholarly worth. Specifically, it is not especially suitable for assessing the utility and value of research conducted as per interpretivist or post-positivist epistemologies where language is often used in non-literal ways. Such is the case, for example, with contributions of authors such as Friedland (2017) and Hochschild (1979; 1983). Hence, although it will be defended that the construct itself (empirical content) has value, it will not be asserted that the remedies outlined in the wake of this article's analysis are either a universal panacea or beyond criticism. These matters are addressed in the second part of the article.

The expression 'empirical content', first used by Ayer (1971: 104), refers to what a proposition discloses about the nature of reality (Ayer also wrote of 'factual content'). As noted, the expression is perhaps easiest to appreciate when reflecting on projects nested in a logical positivist epistemology which use quantitative analyses and generally embrace replicable scientific protocols. In such cases, the notion of a dataset's 'message' is by convention often parsed, for example, as a result with a confidence interval (margin of error) or, as a binary set of propositions: the researcher establishes a hypothesis and seeks to reject its null equivalent. In these circumstances, empirical content mostly boils down to considerations of effect-size and generalisability, typically conceived of as matters of increment-based measurement. However, the substance of research output generated using qualitative

techniques can also be nested in a logical positivist epistemology and thus viewed as empirical, despite being merely repeatable and not replicable. Indeed, as is the case with quantitative studies, considerations of message, effect size and generalisability both structure and constrain the story being told, albeit at differing levels of relative importance and with modified conceptions of what it means to measure. Specifically, the scientifically minded qualitative researcher, rather than providing truncated conclusions, creates a narrative about these three elements. In such cases, the conception of measurement is altered, in some ways marginalised, because data is not in numerical form. Moreover, qualitative researchers typically deemphasise effect size and are comparatively less conservative than their statistically orientated counterparts in generalising a finding. Whatever the case, the task of the qualitative researcher remains concerned with amassing and interpreting evidence. As such and as noted, to the extent that it falls within the logical positivist epistemological tradition, qualitative research is held in check by the same priorities that regulate the quantitative methodologies. These imperatives are concerned with establishing the presence of a finding and determining that finding's magnitude and generalisability (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young & Sutton, 2005; Mays & Pope, 2000).[3]

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[3] In making a distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods as able to be embraced within a logical positivist epistemology, recognition is given to the fact that epistemology is a broader construct than methodology in that it embraces ontological elements. Further, it is noteworthy that although it is possible to invoke a qualitative method in the name of doing science, the expression 'qualitative methodology' is sometimes also applied within post-positivist research. In such latter cases, the notion of a qualitative method often has a different meaning. For further discussion on these matters, see, for example, Friedland (2017).

Hence, in summary, owing to the common bond of discovery that unites researchers irrespective of their methodological orientation (qualitative versus quantitative analytic protocols, etc), in this study, the expression 'empirical content,' is relevant when working in the logical positivist epistemology. Given this constraint, the requirement that the 'implications for practice' section of a scholarly article has empirical content emerges as soon as that article's authors commit themselves to being relevant to management practice.

Research question

The current study examines the linguistic formulation of 'implication for practice' sections of scholarly management articles that embrace a logical positivist epistemology, either through invoking quantitative or qualitative methods. This project's research question is: why is management research which uses scientific protocols and is reported to be practical, often not so?[4] The analytic-synthetic distinction, a concept of medieval descent but central to modern analytic philosophy and specifically to logical positivism, provides a conceptual framework for reconciling relevant data. As will be explained, the purpose of this framework is to discriminate empirical statements from those of other kinds. It will be argued that, given some constraints, only empirical statements are actionable. To put it another way, the use of empirical propositions to formulate recommendations is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for such recommendations to be relevant to management practice.

Since the present study proposes a linguistic analysis of management articles, linguistic considerations have guided its write-up. By way of preamble, what will (not 'may,' not 'can,'

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[4] As noted, within this question, the expression 'scientific protocols' is a proxy (perhaps more user-friendly) term for logical positivist epistemology, a construct which has been discussed and placed in relevant context.

but – for reasons to be provided – 'will') come across to readers as impropriety of tone or lack of sophistication in penmanship stems from an imperative to be relevant and practical, that is, to avoid the pitfalls the study highlights. As such, henceforth a guiding axiom of the stylistic aspect of this article is matter-of-factness (an expression which roughly approximates 'empirical content').

THE ANALYTIC-SYNTHETIC DISTINCTION

This study applies the analytic-synthetic distinction for categorising propositions presented in the practical implications sections of management research articles that have derived results using a logical positivist epistemology. In its most elementary formulation, the dichotomy prescribes that meaningful propositions come in two and only two kinds: analytic and synthetic (Ayer, 1971). Although of medieval origin, the distinction remains a central concept for contemporary analytic philosophers (Stroll & Donnellan, 2016; Schwartz, 2012). Linguists and psychologists apply it "happily" (Horwitch, 1992: 95), as a default option because the objections that have been raised against it are mostly not relevant in those disciplines (see Kant, 1952: 14-19, Ayer, 1971 or Russel, 2014 for more extensive treatment of the analytic-synthetic distinction).

Analytic statements

Analytic statements (sometimes also called *a priori* or formal statements) are those that are true by virtue of the meaning of their terms and the linguistic rules that apply to them. 'All tall men are men,' 'triangles have three sides,' 'all bodies are extended,' 'my neighbour lives next door' or 'my father's brother is my uncle' are straightforward examples. These propositions are true owing to the meaning of the words that compose them. As such, they are essentially

tautologies, correct universally and necessarily because of agreement about word meanings as well as standardised application of grammatical and syntactic conventions.

The verification of analytic statements rests solely on a logical demonstration. It follows that their denial inescapably creates a logical contradiction. For example, once it is known to what the terms refer, it is irrefutable that 'the square root of sixteen is four.' Insofar as management-related subject matter is concerned, the following affirmation is analytic: "charismatic leaders are influential" (Bartone, 2010: 128). In this example, the word charisma, according to conventional usage, is the ability to influence people.

By their nature, analytic propositions are unfalsifiable. As such, their truth status does not rest on (and can therefore be established independently of) experience. Again from the management literature, the statement "a poorly managed organization […] may soar" (Bolman & Deal, 2008: viii) is analytic because the verb form 'may' (variant: might) embraces the possibility that what is proposed will not materialise and in fact that its antithesis might. Furthermore, the formal truth of the assertion remains intact even if there were no such a thing as a poorly managed organisation. Sentences relying on the verb form 'can' or 'could' are also unavoidably analytic because, in a literal sense, they are a delivery means for propositions that cannot be disconfirmed by experience. For example, the statement "organizations can improve the quality of current employees by providing comprehensive training and development activities" (Delaney & Huselid, 1996: 951) is analytic because it implicitly specifies a universe of two possible outcome options but offers no substantive predictions (even in qualitative probabilistic terms through use of modifier adverbs like 'probably' or 'likely') concerning which of these will occur. For practical purposes, the reader of such a sentence concludes no more than comprehensive training will, or will not, improve employee quality. This uncertainty exists because all incoming evidence bearing on the proposition will be compatible with it.

However, this would not be the case if the statement were in the negative. For instance, 'an organisation cannot improve the quality of employees by providing comprehensive training and development activities' is not analytic because one counter-example suffices to establish it as false.

Synthetic statements

Synthetic propositions are distinguishable from analytic ones because their truth status rests solely on empirical verification; in other words, on evidence that an interested party goes out and finds. For example, whether 'there is a black swan' or 'the cat is on the mat' is only known following relevant experience. The truth status of such statements is not ascertained through obtaining agreement about the terms they contain and checking to see if they respect grammatical rules. Rather, synthetic statements are judged against external points of reference as being either true or false. In most circumstances, finding such indicators takes the form of 'looking to see.' However, for the logical positivist researcher, verification is inevitably more formal and comes by way of some form of experimentation and ensuing data collation. It is noteworthy that synthetic statements do not manifest an internal logic which becomes irrefutable when there is consensus about word meanings. Rather, such propositions are best understood as reports on or predictions about sense-based data. Hence, they are not necessarily true but only contingently so and thus, before verified, exist as mere possibilities. Although synthetic statements are subject to correction and elaboration when new data becomes available, their antithesis does not entail a logical contradiction. For example, 'there is no cat on the mat' is as intelligible a proposition as one affirming a feline's presence.

Consequences of the analytic-synthetic distinction

The first consequence of the analytic-synthetic distinction is that, from analytic statements, only other analytic statements are generated. Indeed, as essentially tautologies, such propositions allow only for a restricted range of other derivative declarations. For example, the validity of the affirmation '1+1=2' rests upon agreement about the meaning of relevant symbols and their associated conventions. Once this agreement is reached, there are a circumscribed array of other statements that can be proclaimed (e.g., 2=1+1, 2-1=1, etc.). Such other derivative assertions are self-revealing and do not require resort to empirical (external) points of reference (Ayer, 1971). Specifically, '1+1=2' is an inescapable and universal truth but has no relevance to the hypothesis that 'there are two people in this room.' The truth of the latter (synthetic) statement rests on whether there are two people in the room, which is an empirical, not a logical matter (that is, one that requires sensory evidence, in the form of what is often called data, to be believed). Similarly, from Doris Day's analytic truth 'what will be, will be,' it does not follow that 'personal effort is pointless' because the latter proposition is synthetic and hence an assertion about empirical reality or the nature of the world that is out there to be discovered.

Another consequence of embracing the analytic-synthetic distinction is recognition that there is no *a priori* knowledge of empirical reality because no proposition can be both analytic and synthetic. Indeed, because the principles of logic are true, by definition, their applicability is ubiquitous and cannot be altered by interaction with the world. As such, they are invoked to disprove alleged explanations and rule out possible phenomena as well as to expand the reach and scope of observation. In this latter sense, they allow scientists to use statements about samples to make inferences about populations when specified conditions prevail (Gould & Joullié, 2017).

A further implication of the analytic-synthetic distinction is that to reify that is, to consider an abstraction as a tangible entity, is unjustified because it represents an attempt to bridge the analytic-synthetic divide. Specifically, powers, physical qualities or concrete properties are assignable to tangible entities but not abstract ones. For example, ideas do not have powers, physical qualities or concrete properties; only those individuals who hold them do. To avoid reification, those committed to the analytic-synthetic distinction sometimes adopt a position known as nominalism (Gonzalo, 2016). Nominalists expunge their language of expressions that do not refer to experience and prefer concrete to abstract nouns. For instance, they do not believe they have such 'things' as memory, feelings, values, thoughts, personality or mind, for these terms do not refer to entities that are observable. Instead, nominalists say that they remember, feel, value, think, behave and mind.

The analytic-synthetic distinction is not relevant to all language use and is restricted in its application in specific ways. For example, propositions that cannot be designated as either analytic or synthetic cannot have their logical or empirical status ascertained and hence cannot convey empirical content. They are, insofar as the distinction is concerned, 'senseless' statements. This expression, which is perhaps narrow-minded, is Ayer's (1971), who took his cue from Wittgenstein (1974 [1921]). Expressions like 'metaphysics' or even 'poetry' are possible alternatives to such dismissive labelling. Indeed, conceiving of a proposition as metaphysical or poetic in the context of being unable to classify it as either analytic or synthetic draws attention to the fact that it conveys a different kind of meaning, for example one concerning moral, artistic or existential content. 'I love you,' 'Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this sun of York' or 'God exists' are senseless propositions as far as the analytic-synthetic distinction is concerned but are, in various ways, meaningful. Statements that are appropriately classified as either senseless, metaphysical or poetic include terminologically, grammatically or logically incoherent pronouncements,

accounts referring to fictional, intangible or unobservable entities (such as feelings or psychological events), oxymora, moral norms and judgements, expressions of desire or hope, etc. In sum, the third category of statement (for want of a better term, referred to here as 'senseless') do not ultimately necessitate, as a precursor, either application of logic or collation of experience. It is axiomatic that neither an analytic nor synthetic statement can derive from a nonsensical proposition.

Embracing the analytic-synthetic distinction commits one to using words and phraseology literally and non-equivocally. As such, one assumes a threshold level of agreement between a communicator and a message receiver concerning meaning. When language is used metaphorically, consideration of culture and context typically assist to clarify. For example, to say 'that was a killer concert' is, in a technical sense, a synthetic statement. However, decoding its meaning entails reflection on elements other than the analytic-synthetic distinction. Indeed, in a larger sense, the roles played by context and circumstance in creating understanding is something of a criticism of logical positivist epistemology in that it draws attention to the fact that people have capacity to make sense of the world in idiosyncratic and decidedly non-scientific ways (Friedland, 2017).

Whatever criticisms there are to be made of the analytic-synthetic distinction, provides a defensible means of response to this study's research question. Specifically, since it differentiates logical from empirical truths, it demands the existence of a stable referent against which the validity of claims about reality can be ascertained. In this regard it is somewhat limited in that it does not make room for the view that knowledge comprises a meaningful corpus that has been called subjective, paradigmatic or otherwise socially constructed (Friedland, 2017; Wittgenstein, 1959). However, assuming that journal editors are committed to publishing studies that derive results from logical positivist research (which, as noted, according to their websites, they typically are), this limitation is not inherently a problem when

the dichotomy is used to analyse much management research. Indeed, for present purposes, and given the wording of this study's research question, the framework is suited to the task at hand. Hence, insofar as empirical content is generated from narrow application of scientific protocols, communication of such content requires application of agreed principles; one of which is embrace of the analytic-synthetic distinction.

STUDY METHOD

If researchers are to respect the mission statements of the scholarly journals in which they publish (and especially those preferencing a logical positivist research epistemology), they do their job when they include in their 'implication for practice' sections statements that convey empirical content. As such, using language in a specified way is at least as pressing a priority as imperatives concerning a study's method robustness, sample representativeness and subject matter topicality.

In this study, to verify whether 'implication for practice' sections convey empirical content, all articles published in 2015 in *AMJ*, *EMR*, *JoM* and *APJoM* were reviewed, excluding editorial pieces, commentaries, guidelines, errata, corrigenda, addresses, dialogues, interviews, book reviews and announcements of awards and those that unambiguously do not embrace a logical positivist epistemology.[5] This is a sample of 198 articles (why this sample is

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[5] Articles were considered to fall within the logical positivist epistemological sphere, regardless of their methodological orientation, unless explicitly specified not to be the case. In other words, a broad criterion for inclusion was used for article selection. This approach is justified on two bases. First, that words and expressions such as 'data,' 'evidence,' 'facts,' 'experiment,' 'verification' and the like index embrace of logical positivism. Second and as

representative is discussed in the 'Study Limitations' section). Many of these offer explicit claims to managerial practice (that is, include an 'implications for practice,' 'managerial implications' or similar heading, hereafter referred to as 'IFP'). When an IFP heading is present, claims relevant to practice were sought under it, but not elsewhere. In the absence of an IFP section identified as such, the article was not further analysed.

As noted, to classify a proposition as analytic, synthetic or nonsensical entails taking that proposition at face value, in its strict literal sense. Automated analyses relying on key words or syntactical constructions are incapable of performing the task, for the texts must be understood and their meaning evaluated. Further, IFP sections, when these are present, contain multiple sentences. Fortunately, however, not all of these needed to be analysed because most merely lead to, support, or elaborate upon the few propositions that are consequential for practitioners. Other statements are merely rhetorical filler and, on this basis, excluded from consideration.

For the purpose of this study, six principles (presented and defended in the following paragraphs) have been devised. By way of an overview, the first four of these are purely pragmatic. In pruning IFP sections to their core claims, they (the principles) are concerned primarily with defining the scope of what is analysed so that maximum effort is focused on answering the study's research question. The fifth and sixth principles are conceptual in nature, with the last one (the sixth principle) serving to classify. These latter two principles derive from the logic of the analytic-synthetic distinction. They are comprehensively defended elsewhere (Ayer, 1971: 50ff). In the rest of this section, the six principles are individually presented and defended.

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noted, the mission statements of the journals retained for analysis reflect the epistemological orientations of research articles published in those articles.

First, only statements that are original to the study reported in the article under review need to be considered because conclusions that are presented as established by previous studies are not focal (typical form: 'as Author (reference) showed, a smooth CEO succession is essential to firm success'). Illustrations of results of the current study by way of an actual or hypothetical example ('a manager could therefore decide to…') need not be considered either, since they merely elaborate a finding that has been previously stated. In any case, as the pattern just mentioned exemplifies, such sentences do not purport to have practical implications in and of themselves; their role is explanatory.

Second, even when found in the IFP section, statements offering comments that are in fact overtly relevant to theory or literature (because they mention these terms) are excluded from consideration. The rationale here is that these propositions have been misplaced. Indeed, they should have been included in, for example, 'implication for theory', 'results' or 'general discussion' sections, respectively, of their articles (but such conventions are not always followed strictly). This is often the case in qualitative studies where authors tend to shift back and forth from accounts of what they have observed to conclusions offered as generalisations.

Third, unsupported but nonetheless mainstream propositions (example: 'managers desire to be successful'), certain statements using a conditional verb form to convey imprecisely the idea that a finding is vaguely relevant elsewhere (example: 'there are other cases where the model would apply') and introductory or concluding summarising sentences (example: 'these conclusions have implications for practice') do not require analysis. These kinds of assertions are excluded because they are not meant to convey findings that have managerial relevance directly or in and of themselves. Rather, authors use them as rhetorical 'filler' to bring ideas into a coherent narrative.

Fourth, statements relying on the conditional verb form 'should' (variants: 'ought to,' 'must,' 'well advised to,' 'need to,' more rarely 'would') do not need to be considered for further analysis. The rationale here is that, although offered as flowing from a study, such propositions are not practical implications but advisory-type recommendations and, as such, entail value judgments. Specifically, their acceptability rests on the normative (widely embraced) principle that the objectives of managerial effectiveness, efficiency, productivity, etc. are universally desirable. Hence, on the basis that management authors and their readers share a set of priorities, these statements have been treated as redundant and therefore inconsequential. The alternative (not pursued in the present analysis) was to consider them as nonsensical propositions since they express neither an analytical truth nor an empirical finding but rather convey a particular party's personal priority. The status of these propositions is further discussed in the 'Limitations' section of the current study.

Fifth, in line with the principle that no synthetic proposition derives from an analytic one (or a nonsensical one), when the opening statement (usually the first or topic sentence) of a paragraph is analytic or nonsensical, it is recorded, but the rest of the paragraph is excluded from further analysis. This is a conceptual principle (previously discussed when the distinction was presented) that flows logically from the dichotomy itself (see, for example, Ayer, 1971, for a more comprehensive exposition). Hence, in the present case, when the opening statement of a paragraph is synthetic and what comes after is elaboration or exploration of its consequences, the entire paragraph is considered as forming one proposition, that which opens it. When a paragraph contains propositions advanced as logically unrelated, these are analysed separately.

Sixth, when a sentence combines successive but logically (inductively) connected claims that classify differently (example: 'X may cause Y which leads to Z,' the elements of which

classify as analytic and synthetic, respectively), it is categorised according to its first claim, that upon which the entire proposition rests. This sixth principle derives from the same logic as the fifth one, but at the sentence level. As such, it (like principle 5) is conceptual in nature and a logical outworking of the distinction (once again, for more on this see, Ayer, 1971). It does not reduce the number of propositions to analyse but systematises their classification.

Taken together, the aforementioned six principles reduce substantially the volume of material that needs to be subjected to the analytic-synthetic distinction classificatory analysis. This study's authors reviewed selected articles separately; when they disagreed about how a proposition should be classified, such discrepancy was resolved through deliberation and consensus. Appendix A provides an example of how the six coding principles apply to an actual IFP section that was included in the study.

RESULTS

Prior to presenting this study's results in a form that provides a structured response to the research question (the Discussion), this section presents central elements of the findings in aggregated form.

Although the four journals retained for the present study aim at practical relevance, only 80 (40.4%) of the 198 articles they published in 2015 (excluding 'From the Editors,' corrigenda, etc.) include a section explicitly dedicated to this objective. The number of articles reviewed appears in Table 1, together with the type of study they report. Altogether, 69 articles are based on a quantitative study and 11 on a qualitative study. The six principles presented earlier filter the IFP sections of these 80 articles to 225 propositions that are candidates for the analytic-synthetic distinction, 201 of them coming from quantitative studies and 24 from qualitative studies (see Table 2 for more details).

(insert Tables 1 and 2 about here)

Overall results, broken down by journal and by type of study, appear in Table 3. Among propositions retained for analysis, 34 (15%, n =225) are synthetic, 59 nonsensical (26%) and 132 (59%) analytic. The nature of the study (quantitative vs. qualitative) from which the statements come does not substantially affect these proportions. At the article level, of the 80 that include an IFP section, 25 (31%) offer one or more synthetic statement(s). When all articles (i.e., those that do and do not include an IFP section) published in 2015 are considered (198), this percentage falls to 12.6%. In summary, although resorting to state-of-the-art statistical or semantic analysis, approximately seven eighth (87.4%) of contributions published in 2015 in the four journals retained for this study either fail to propose at least one explicit practical implication or, when they do, formulate it in a way that makes it either analytic or nonsensical, in either case empirically irrelevant.

(insert Table 3 about here)

This study's surveyed articles do contain many synthetic propositions, in the form of, for example, charts, tables and reviewed literature. However, because these typically are not within 'implications for practice' sections, they are not germane because they have no consequence for answering this study's research question. Rather, what does make a piece of research valuable for present purposes (practice) is the way its results are presented as explicitly empirically actionable propositions. The current study focuses exclusively on such statements, as found in relevant dedicated sections of sampled journals.

Rather than review each analytic and senseless statement collected during this study's review process, what follows is a summarised exposition of the findings. For the sake of clarity and brevity, all examples discussed in the following pages have been slightly adapted from the

surveyed articles; Tables 4, 5 and 6 provide actual illustrations of analytic, nonsensical and synthetic propositions, respectively, with their references.

(insert Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6 about here)

Use of 'suggest'

A salient result of this study is that the verb 'to suggest' (or its derivatives) frequently appears in IFP of management articles. Specifically, it is in 50 (or 22%) of the 225 analysed propositions. It is typically found in sentences such as 'results suggest that...' or similar phraseology. The 2002 edition of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary accessed on 13-April 2016 propose that to 'suggest' is to 'introduce to the mind,' to 'call to mind by association,' to 'evoke,' to 'give the impression,' to 'serve as a motive or inspiration' or to 'imply a possibility or hypothesis.' In keeping with the spirit of what these usages entail, to write that a study 'suggests' a practical implication is thus to insinuate that a subjective process has been at work in the collection, reading, description or interpretation of the data. Such a formulation leaves open the possibility that different parties viewing the same results will interpret them differently. This is not inherently a problem as a feature of logical positivism is distinction between observation and inference (Gauch, 2005). However, when such distinction is not made explicit, the advantages of science are eroded. In this regard, several principles are in play. First, it is typically appropriate to specify and justify relevant putative interpretations of a dataset. Second, defence of a chosen interpretation is, according to logical positivist orthodoxy, largely a matter of inference minimisation (i.e., to let the 'data do the talking'; Gauch, 2005). To not take account of such axioms when using 'suggest' opens researchers to the charge that they are distancing themselves from a conclusion or otherwise engaging in obfuscation. Furthermore, by canvassing and eliminating possible data interpretations (through, for example, application of the Ockham's razor parsimony

principle), use of the word 'suggest' is minimised or even eliminated in favour of words such as 'reveal', 'disclose' or 'indicate.' Whatever the case, it is of conceptual consequence that inclusion of a word like 'suggest' in a proposition renders that proposition neither analytic nor synthetic through calling on an unobservable and non-logical process and by default assigns that proposition to the so-called nonsense (or poetic) category, for want of a better term.

Given the prevalence of the expression 'suggest' in scholarly articles, a possible rejoinder to the charge that such a form of wording is senseless is to argue that 'suggest' is being used instead of 'show' or 'demonstrate.' This rebuttal establishes the verb form 'suggest' as a figure of speech fashionable in management studies and as such, ultimately, a superficial matter of convention, even when embracing a logical positivist epistemology. However, from the reader's perspective there remains a concern that the word and others of similar meaning render unduly ambiguous the import of what is being proposed. Indeed, sometimes this malaise is exacerbated; for example, when the verb is used to obscure, as in "these results are suggestive, but not conclusive" (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer & Luk, 2005: 272). Moreover, there are occasions when authors combine the verb with 'appear' or 'seem' as in 'findings seem to suggest that...' (e.g. Byron & Laurence 2015: 318). In such cases, phraseology creates additional layers of distancing and obfuscation.

Another argument for using the verb 'suggest' is to propose that, under the pen of management authors, it means 'inductively infer.' According to such a view, the verb expresses the idea that a finding concerning a limited number of observations is indexing a general phenomenon. However, if by 'suggest' researchers intend to invoke inductive reasoning, then the reader is best served when this intention is plainly and explicitly stated. Moreover, inductive reasoning commits researchers to applying statistical principles associated with moving from conclusions about samples to ones about populations, once again explicitly invoking the

aforementioned distinction between observation and inference (Gould & Joullié, 2017). By contrast, there are no delimiting principles associated with less precise forms of suggesting in that something can be said to suggest anything else. Likewise, in the absence of some consideration of relevant context and caveats, a mere suggestion pre-emptively exonerates advice-givers from a future accusation that they gave the wrong, or bad, counsel (similar comments apply if 'suggest' is mistakenly used to mean 'logically imply'). These criticisms apply equally to expressions like 'appear,' 'seem,' 'hint at' or 'point to.' Hence, it is here concluded that, insofar as management research is concerned, use of 'suggest' should not be the first port of call when selecting a verb to associate a dataset with an actionable message.

Verb forms 'may,' 'might,' 'can' or 'could'

In this article's surveyed IFP sections, analytic propositions are omnipresent. The most frequent kind stem from liberal use of the verb forms 'may' or 'might' which typically occur in sentences like 'jobs held by entry-level employees may be redesigned to provide employees with greater autonomy' or 'rewarding helping may be beneficial when an organization is young.' Eighty, or 35.5%, of all statements analysed for this study offer advice to managers using wording which conforms to this or a similar semantic structure. As mentioned, propositions revolving around the verb form 'can' (variant 'could,' 'enable,' 'help' or 'allow') as in 'staffing can buffer turnover' or 'employees who realize their aspirations can experience a sense of fit' are also analytic. Such statements represent over 22.7% (n=225) of those analysed for this study.

Other formulations are similarly analytic. They include 'there are potential benefits to electronic communication during non-work time' or 'performance of agentic behaviors is likely to help women overcome gender bias.' These expressions (and others of comparable meaning) are found in 21 of the 225 propositions analysed for this study. The issue here is that any

benefit, if it is not associated with clear time and trigger event contingencies, is 'latent': if it has not yet manifested, one presumably has only to wait in anticipation for its materialisation. Likewise, any practice has a 'potential advantage' or 'will ultimately positively affect,' since, without qualification, 'potential' or 'ultimate' refers to an unspecified point in the future (and with benefit of an unspecified magnitude). Moreover, a strategy 'is likely to facilitate,' because adverbs such as 'likely', when loosely used, preclude empirical refutation.[6] This is especially so when they are combined with verbs such as 'facilitate' or 'help' which are subjective or convey the idea that mysterious or mercurial influences must coexist to realise an effect. An actual example of such a formulation is "Our findings seem to suggest that performance of agentic behaviors is likely to help women overcome gender bias at least in the context of self-managing teams" (Lanaj & Hollenbeck, 2015: 1490).

Lest readers think that analytic statements such as the aforementioned exemplars are rare but regrettable exceptions specific to the journals scrutinised here, Powell (2001, 2002) as well as Priem and Butler (2001a & 2001b) pointed out that tautologies proliferate in strategic

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[6] A qualification is required here. In practice, most instances of use of the word 'likely' in management literature cannot be convincingly subject to falsification. An example is 'it is likely that employee X will continue to receive good performance appraisals.' For such a proposition, there is no specified endpoint at which an assessment of likelihood can be made. However, because the word 'likely' literally means 'to occur across multiple occasions with a frequency greater than 0.5', there are circumstances where 'likely' can be construed as meaningful and propositions that use the term can be falsified. One could say, for example, that a coin is special because it is 'likely' that, when flipped, it will come up heads the majority of the time. Conventions of inferential statistics will falsify the statement if the coin is not special.

management literature. In their simplest expression, these commentators' arguments run as follows: since elements such as competitive advantage and valuable resources are only identified within successful firms, they cannot, in and of themselves, explain these firms' success. Thus, saying that an entity is successful because it has competitive advantage or valuable resources is equivalent to saying it is successful because it is successful, a tautology and self-evidently of no practical relevance. Expressed in the terms of the present study, when strategic management scholars claim to have identified a given firm's competitive advantage or valuable resources, they do not propose a statement conveying empirical content (a synthetic statement) but rather an analytic truth.

Reifications

Four statements of Table 5 have one feature in common: they consider abstract entities such as 'companies,' 'firms' and 'culture' as if they were tangible and in particular had independent agency. That is, these propositions rely on reifications. Twelve of the 25 synthetic propositions identified by this study share this feature. Authors write of 'companies,' 'work culture,' 'strategy,' etc. as if these notions had an autonomous concrete existence aside from that of the human beings who comprise and create them. This view, which is defended in literature (e.g., Schein, 2004), implies that such things as culture or organisations are derivative phenomena and as such to be wrestled with through examining the aggregate activities of individuals.[7] However, on closer inspection, what is in fact mostly being observed is not aggregated activity of any kind but rather individuals who are doing something independently or communicating with others. Given such context, a strict application of the analytic-synthetic distinction leads to a reclassification from the synthetic to the nonsense (or poetic) category of those statements

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[7] There are other views of 'culture' (see for example, the discussion by Gray *et al*, 2007).

which make use of reified concepts as if they were tangible objects with human-like agency. The 25 synthetic propositions initially identified thus reduce to 13 (out of 225 analysed, i.e., an overall proportion of 5.8%), coming from 10 different articles (out of 80 with an IFP section, i.e. 12.5%).

Readers resisting the reclassification of reifications as nonsense or poetry are justified in pointing-out that terms like 'organisation,' 'culture' or 'strategy' are shorthand for collective and aggregated behaviour and its implied objectives that management authors use because they are convenient. This line of defence holds up when explicitly accompanied by the caveat that the terms refer to ethereal entities. However, in practice (and as noted), the present study's results reveal that management scholars often do little to facilitate reader comprehension of this point. For example, they typically do not remind their audience that firms (in a non-legal or non-accounting sense) do not invest, organisations do not produce anything, cultures do not reward and strategies do not improve performance because these constructs do not exist in a way that straightforwardly justifies them having physical attributes or being the bearers of powers.

While it is true that institutions and business entities often have legal and accounting-related autonomy and in a sense thus have anthropomorphic characteristics (e.g., they enter into contracts and can be sued), it is not in this technical denotation that terms like 'firm,' 'company' or 'organisation' are generally used in management journals. However, even more problematically, constructs such as 'culture' and 'strategy' are unambiguously not endowed with what lawyers call a 'corporate personality' (Ireland, 1996). Hence, when authors write 'organisation' to mean 'business entity' in the legal sense of the expression, they have taken the first step toward making a synthetic (and unimpeachable) statement. For example, 'BMW A.G. has paid dividends to shareholders' is a synthetic statement. However, when authors write

'organisation' to mean 'group of people' without specifying precisely who these people are and ascribe independent faculties or powers to that group, they reify an abstraction and propose a statement that is neither analytic nor synthetic. In these latter cases, the practical utility of propositions is compromised. In light of such logic, it is less than ideal to portray an organisation as a baby taking its first steps. Similarly, a manager waiting for his organisation (as distinct from its members) to do something will not know what to observe.

Reifications (and the ascribing of anthropomorphic characteristics or powers to non-human entities) are pervasive in management literature. Certainly, and to repeat a point previously made, in non-literal ways they have value, a point made by scholars working within an interpretivist epistemology and concerned with extracting idiosyncratic meaning from the output of a research project (Friedland, 2017). However, the fact remains that a ruthless application of the analytic-synthetic distinction results in the dismissal of much of that corpus of organisational scholarship nested in a logical positivist epistemology that uses reifications. This observation illustrates the importance of circumscribing and defining precisely what abstractions mean within a particular study's context and providing commentary on the entities that give rise to them when conducting logical positivist research. Without such clarification, the practical implications of much organisational research in the domain are rendered trivial, loose, unduly imprecise and inevitably problematic to implement. Adding to the malaise, it is also noteworthy that there is no consensus about the precise definition of terms such as 'organisation' or 'culture' (Gray *et al.*, 2007).

DISCUSSION

This study's research question is: why is management research which uses scientific protocols and is reported to be practical often not so? The response to this question is that, in their majority, the implications for practice sections of relevant literature do not contain synthetic

statements. As such, they are largely bereft of empirical content. Yet it is empirical content that provides the basis for practice and actionability. To appreciate the seriousness of this finding, it is noteworthy to reflect on the self-evident fact that words and phraseology are the medium through which something is – or is not – disclosed about the nature of reality. To the extent that a new and novel phenomenon is being revealed about the world, that phenomenon can be acted upon.

To summarise, in creating an argument about the role of language, this project has amassed data which sheds light on a crucial element of why there has been a long-running concern that practical recommendations in management literature are often not as advertised. In straightforward terms, when reading an 'implications for practice' section of a study which purportedly (or even implicitly) embraces allegiance to logical positivist epistemology, it is difficult to know, in the absence of appropriately focused synthetic statements, what to do next. A consequential reason for such ambiguity concerns failure to take head of a central tool of logical positivist epistemology, the analytic-synthetic distinction.

To illustrate the phenomena unearthed in the current project, it is revealing to interpret further one of its more controversial findings. Specifically, fifteen percent of propositions retained for the study, coming from 31% of articles (fewer than 6% of propositions and 12.5% of articles when reifications are excluded) published in *AMJ, JoM, EMR* and *APJoM* in 2015 classify as synthetic. Expressed differently, a small minority of statements appearing in 'implications for practice' sections represent, if true, a genuine contribution to management practice when judged from a logical-positivist perspective. These results are comparable with those reported by Bartunek & Rynes (2010) who reviewed 1,738 articles published in five leading management and management-related journals in 1992 and 1993 and between 2003 and 2007. Bartunek & Rynes (2010: 105) found that, overall, 74% (up to 89% for some

journals, depending on the year considered) of IFP sections used tentative language (built upon 'may,' 'speculate,' 'potentially,' etc.), which therefore classifies as either analytic or nonsensical.

In view of the present study's findings, one conclusion is compelling: managers are justified in being sceptical about the implications that flow from the research published in journals such as those retained for the current study. Indeed, when Bartunek and Rynes (2010: 108) commented that the writing style of IFP sections "probably discourages practitioners from imagining ways in which academic findings might be applied," they were understating the extent of the malaise. Keeping in mind that fewer than 6% of their propositions are synthetic when statements relying on reifications are excluded from consideration (and taking account of the protocols of statistical inference making), closer to the truth is to conclude that the IFP sections of the articles such as those surveyed for the present study propose little that has empirical content (as this construct was described in this study's Introduction).

When research employs a logical positivist epistemology to frame a study, criticism about language use is not pedantic. Indeed and as argued, to receive the full advantage of the scientific method as understood by logical positivists, words have a particularised application. One way to appreciate this point is to consider other domains, such as advertising or marketing, where inappropriate language use is often the difference between an acceptable promotional slogan and a misleading one, that is, between lawful and unlawful conduct. For example, while pharmaceutical firms' executives cannot assert that their drugs are beneficial to patients without producing evidence that this is the case (obtained notably through rigorous clinical trials, etc), claims that food supplements such as vitamins 'may improve blood circulation' or 'can enhance general health' are perhaps hypocritical, but remain legal and standard practice.

Regulators (like those responsible for the US Food and Drug Administration) are sensitive to, indeed obsessed with, these kinds of linguistic differences (Calfee, 2002).

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Sample choice and study's focus

This study has methodological limitations. For example, insofar as journal choice is concerned, a sampling strategy was used, thus opening the door on the possibility that the content scrutinised was not representative. A recoil defence against such attack is to point out that extracted data was from periodicals that are widely known and prestigious in their field, as evidenced for instance by the presence of two of them (*AMJ* and *JoM*) on the *Financial Times'* list of the fifty journals most widely used in business schools. As such, whatever problems exist in the articles of these publication are likely to be present with at least the same frequency in others. However, not all leading organisation studies journals address themselves to the problem of how managers go about their job. For instance, *Administrative Science Quarterly* (*ASQ*) was not retained because it focuses not on immediate managerial or policy relevance but on inculcating theoretical and philosophical understanding of organisational life in context (Davis, 2015: 185). To wit, of the twenty research articles published by *ASQ* in 2015, only one offers an explicitly identified IFP section.

The present study drew data exclusively from articles published in 2015. In keeping with the principle that science is self-correcting (e.g., Popper, 2002), the decision was made to select the most recent year available when the study was started as the basis for forming a stratified random sample. Moreover, this approach made the content reviewed topical and relevant. Whatever the case, the criticism that the sampling strategy was not representative is somewhat weakened by the presence of convergent validity. Specifically, this study's results – although

derived through invoking a novel analytic framework – are entirely compatible with those reported by Bartunek and Rynes (2010) in their review of IFP sections of 1,738 *AMJ* articles published between 2003 and 2007.

This study's analysis of articles was limited to the 'implications for practice' sections when these were present. It is possible that, assuming the study to be properly designed and executed and its results clearly articulated, readers will be able to extract implications for practice from the article that report it, even though these have not been explicitly articulated or assigned to a dedicated section. Certainly, this possibility exists, however if the authors themselves did not think their work had direct practical implication, forcing one upon it requires selective or subjective reading. Such an approach will likely misrepresent the researchers' work and depart from their intentions. Indeed, as Bartunek and Rynes (2010: 101) noted, it is only in the IFP sections of scholarly management articles where practitioners are addressed.

Filtering principles and analysis' accuracy

The six principles established before the textual analysis was conducted are mostly utilitarian and as such do not necessitate extensive theoretical justification. Indeed, four of them are delimiting in nature in order to focus analytic effort on the study's research question. As mentioned, the objective of these principles is to reduce IFP sections to their core claims. Ignoring all advisory propositions (those making use of 'should,' 'ought to,' 'must' and other expressions to the same effect) perhaps appears as an oversight, leaving the articles bereft of substance or message. This is fair criticism because it seems so fundamental that, in one way or another, commitment to improving managerial effectiveness and efficiency is the *raison d'être* of management academia. However, a closer inspection is revealing. In fact, management authors and their readers do not necessarily have a shared understanding of this commitment. Indeed, although consensual at first sight, a commitment to improving

managerial performance is interpretable in conflicting and sometimes controversial ways. For instance, when Jacquart and Antonakis (2015: 1070) write, as a practical implication of their study, that "leaders […] should project strong charisma in times of attributional ambiguity, and also associate or dissociate themselves from performance signals depending on whether the signals are positive or negative," one is left wondering whose prospects are enhanced if these recommendations are heeded. Misaligned interests of parties in commercial endeavour have long received the attention of agency theorists in the case of the governance problem (Bosse & Phillips, 2016; Chen, Lu & Sougiannis, 2011) and industrial sociologists in the case of the labour relations problem (Braverman, 1998; Fox, 1974). Even in disciplines, like medicine, where parties share objectives that are *prima facie* universal (preserving life, improving health), there exist debates about the relative importance of such objectives because the interests of nurses, doctors, patients and their families (not to mention foetuses) do not always coincide. These kinds of mismatched priorities render recommendations to improve management as ambiguous at best. Moreover and as noted, since recommendations rest on a value judgement, a strict application of the analytic-synthetic distinction classifies them as nonsensical (use of the word nonsensical here is in Ayer's aforementioned narrow sense; to repeat a point already made, it is certainly not intended to imply that such recommendations are necessarily without worth).

It is also possible that, even though the present authors have dispassionately scrutinised articles' IFP sections, they have misunderstood, miscoded, selectively read or otherwise misrepresented some of them. Ambiguous cases exist; for instance, there are examples of propositions containing analytic, synthetic and nonsensical components. As explained and justified, the principle retained in the current study is that the first part of the sentence determines its entire classification. Certainly, such a measure perhaps does not necessarily capture the intended overall meaning of the proposition. To deal with such criticism, a rejoinder

from analogy is illuminating: the misplacement of a few trees does not affect the location of the forest. As such, even if a handful of synthetic statements were not identified, this study's conclusion remains robust. Indeed, from the perspective of the scientific enterprise, the research results that found their way in 2015 into the four selected journals' implication for practice sections were mostly conveyed in terms that made them unjustifiably difficult to operationalise because they used words and phraseology that are bereft of empirical content. Hence, notwithstanding the caveats offered when presenting and critiquing the analytic-synthetic distinction and in particular the charge that it is a less potent analytic tool when applied in interpretivist and post-positivist epistemologies, awareness of the distinction sharpens up the benefits of logical positivist research. Certainly, when sticking within this corpus of scholarship, it uncompromisingly classifies statements in a way that causes pause for reflection.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AUTHORS AND RESEARCHERS: PRACTICAL RELEVANCE THROUGH LINGUISTIC RIGOUR

The debate about the value of scholarly studies to managers has at times been framed as a battle between relevance and rigour, as if a trade-off existed (e.g. Kieser & Leiner, 2009; Palmer, Dick & Freiburger, 2009). *AMJ* Editor George (2014: 1) took a different view when he argued that there are conditions under which relevance and rigour co-exist. The present authors concur. When something akin to a logical positivist epistemology is being used to frame a research project, language use is instrumental to delivering both relevance and rigour. As such, if researchers committed to doing logical positivist research want to be read by practitioners when they believe their work has practical implications (and when their results are indeed practical) they need to be linguistically rigorous when they formulate these implications. In particular, the language they use to report the practical import of their projects is at its best when it conveys

empirical content. In furtherance of this objective, the following recommendations are proposed.

First, if practical relevance is their objective, authors do their job when they refrain from using the verb form 'may' and 'might' when wording practical implications. Sentences using either of these terms are analytic propositions; as such, they are unable to be a medium for delivering empirically actionable content. This incapacity arises because anything 'may' cause, influence, improve, etc. anything else. Similarly, sentences relying on the verb forms 'can' or 'could' should be avoided when formulating practical research conclusions. Indeed, unless probabilities are specified, that 'something can lead to something else' is somewhat eviscerated of meaning. However, knowing that something has a consequence under precise conditions or in a specified percentage of cases (or even through use of modifier adverbs such as 'likely to,' 'probably will,' etc.) has practical utility. Self-evidently, results based on statistical inference and application of sampling distributions are uncertain. Nonetheless, it is possible to quantify such uncertainty, for instance by way of being precise about confidence intervals or significance levels associated with hypothesis testing protocols. Although it is understandable that researchers are inclined to be prudent when advancing their findings, if a research project is to realise its full potential insofar as IFP sections are concerned, such circumspection is best held in check in the interests of packaging a finding so that it has workplace relevance. For present purposes, this boils down to using language in a specialised way. Specifically, given the right epistemological context, use of the words 'may,' 'might,' 'can' and 'should' in the 'implications' sections of manuscripts is not advisable. Such avoidance will create incentive for authors to make unambiguous and assertive statements or, if they do not, accompany a modified approach with rationale.

Second, and again if both scientific relevance and clarity are each pressing objectives, authors should refrain from using the words 'must' or 'should' when writing-up practical implications sections unless (as is the case in the current sentence) what their imperative or recommendation is meant to achieve and its underlying rationale are provided. In the same vein, if they seek to be dispassionate scientists, management scholars are true to their mission when they content themselves with the objective study and exposition only of phenomena that fall within their sphere of inquiry. As such, they remain within their domain of expertise when they leave the translation into recommendations of the results of their investigations to those responsible and accountable for implementation: the managers (which implies a value judgement about a particular outcome deemed to be desirable). It is noteworthy that not only is a general commitment to organisational or managerial improvement too ambiguous to be meaningful but, unless they have a foot in the business world, researchers are not credentialled as practitioners.

Third, reifications have a limited role to play within management scholarship. Indeed, although conceptualisation is the precursor to generalisation, the imperative of precision is a higher-order priority than universality in the quest for practical relevance. The more often reifications are used in a text, the greater the risk that reality is not being faithfully portrayed. For the struggling workplace manager, ambiguity obtains if abstractions are employed without clear exposition of what they represent. Here as elsewhere, Ockham's razor (the parsimony principle) is a sound axiom. Although strict medieval nominalism, of which Ockham was a vociferous advocate, is a high bar to clear for logical positivist management research, a dose of his philosophy is desirable (on this theme, see Spillane, 2018).

Fourth, those writing-up practical implications sections competently fulfill their mission when they precisely delimit what they are saying through reference to empirical results, standard form arguments that are free from logical fallacies and (when required) stipulation of

the assumptions and constraints of statistical inference. Logic, informed by fact-based evidence, does not 'suggest' but rather supports rejection of a null hypotheses or is able to be talked about using the language of confidence intervals and other circumscribed techniques. While suggestions *may* stir the interest or imagination of researchers and trigger further investigations, the practitioner encounters them as confusing or ambiguous and is thus inclined to disregard them. As such, managers seeking to ground what they do (their practice) on research findings do not benefit from the suspicions, suggestions, speculations or hints of others, even if such missives come from learned and well-intentioned scholars.

CONCLUSION

It would be presumptuous to require that all management research be practically relevant. Indeed, for reasons noted in this article's Introduction, there is value in knowledge for knowledge's sake. Moreover, in some respects, practical relevance is a serendipitous by-product of research that is not motivated by a desire to assist managers be better at their jobs (Martin, 2007). It bears repeating also that not all epistemology is of the logical positivist kind. When researchers embrace other ontological frameworks, the way they use language departs in consequential ways from that invoked by those doing and talking about science, as exemplified in the classical tradition of Descartes, Locke, Comte, etc. In fact, when research output does not emerge from a logical positivist epistemology, language use often becomes especially complex. However, notwithstanding these caveats, there is still a dilemma. Simply put and as noted in the Introduction, the lip-service problem exists: the result of much management research, although intended to be so, is not especially relevant to practice. To repeat a phrase coined earlier, not all researchers 'practise practice.'

It is hard to escape that, once research is purported to embrace a logical positivist epistemology, those undertaking it are handcuffed to its double dependence on experience and

logic. Authors of management research who are committed to the protocols of such an epistemology therefore subject themselves to the scrutiny and verdict of the analytic-synthetic distinction. Once this reasoning is accepted, formulating recommendations for the language of implications for practice sections in studies embracing the conventions of such a framework is relatively straightforward.

As AACSB's and EQUIS' mission statements insist, management academia does not exist to serve its own interests. Indeed, in crucial respects, it is there for managers, their workforces, their employers and (beyond the interests of these actors) ultimately myriad individuals interacting with workplaces. It has been noted that, if left unaddressed, the practical relevance question that beleaguers management research will transform into a full-blown legitimacy crisis (Davis, 2015; McGrath, 2007; Khurana, 2007: 363-371). The authors of this article have argued that management scholars will enhance their credibility when they take stock of how they speak about those of their findings that they propose have practical relevance. This article focused on the language-use of researchers embracing a logical positivist epistemology. For these colleagues, the present work's authors readily concede that linguistic rigour will not deliver practical relevance in and of itself. Indeed, the broader solution (and hence the one that precedes consideration of language use) is to double-down on a commitment to understanding – in full – the epistemology in which a research project is nested and to embracing – in full – protocols associated with that epistemology.

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TABLES (5)

Journal	Number of articles reviewed	Number of articles with IFP section		
		Quantitative study	Qualitative study	Total
AMJ	76	32	6	38
EMR	15	2	1	3
JoM	67	23	2	25
APJoM	40	12	2	14
Total	198	69	11	80

Table 1: Number of articles reviewed, per journal and per type of study.

Journal	Number of propositions analysed		
	Quantitative study	Qualitative study	Total
AMJ	102	13	115
EMR	4	1	5
JoM	64	5	69
APJoM	31	5	36
Total	201	24	225

Table 2: Number of propositions analysed, per journal and per type of study.

Journal	Number of analytic statements	Number of synthetic statements	Number of nonsensical statements	Total number of statements analysed
AMJ	75	13	27	115
Coming from qualitative studies	10	1	2	13
Coming from quantitative studies	65	12	25	102
APJoM	21	5	10	36
Coming from qualitative studies	3	1	1	5
Coming from quantitative studies	18	4	9	31
EMR	2	3	-	5
Coming from qualitative studies		1	-	1
Coming from quantitative studies	2	2	-	4

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JoM	34	13	22	69
Coming from qualitative studies	4		1	5
Coming from quantitative studies	30	13	21	64
Grand Total	132	34	59	225

Table 3: Results

Journal	Author(s)	Page(s)	Statement
AMJ	Firth, Hollenbeck, Miles, Ilgen & Barnes, 2015	828	Extrapolating from our findings, decisions to implement interventions such as frame-of-reference training might benefit from assessing levels of coordination in each component team type.
JoM	Dalal, Meyer, Bradshaw, Green, Kelly & Zhu, 2015	282	Strong personalities may be preferred when there is a need to resist strong situations.
APJoM	Morin, Meyer, McInerney, Marsh & Ganotice, 2015	739	Our findings demonstrate that the implications of [continuance commitment] might also depend on the strength of the other mindsets.
EMR	Parra-Requena, Ruiz-Ortega, Garcia-Villaverde &	163	[Managers'] networks can produce a state of myopia that can end up producing a negative effect.

	Rodrigo-Alarcon, 2015		

Table 4: Examples of analytic propositions.

Journal	Author(s)	Page(s)	Statement
AMJ	Chung, Liao, Jackson, Subramony, Colakoglu & Jiang, 2015	1510	[O]ur results suggest that one effective approach is to create a favorable diversity climate.
JoM	Chadwick & Raver, 2015	980	[B]elow we speculate on the practical implications that may emerge.
APJoM	Lu & Ma, 2015	1059	Our study suggests that it is critical to consider the nature of resources in the pursuit of potential synergies between partners' resources.

Table 5: Examples of nonsensical propositions.

Journal	Author(s)	Page(s)	Statement	Reification?
AMJ	Godart, Maddux, Shipilov & Galinsky, 2015	215	Companies produce more creative innovations if their leaders have professional experiences abroad.	Yes
AMJ	Hu & Liden, 2015	1122	When team members are motivated toward promoting the benefits of others, they produce higher performance, more	

			OCB, and stay in their teams for a longer period.	
AMJ	Su & Tsang, 2015	1143	Our findings show that firms adjusting their social engagements in accordance with their product scopes have better financial performance.	Yes
AMJ	Wo, Ambrose & Schminke, 2015	1863	Our studies demonstrate the importance of supervisors.	
JoM	Restubog, Zagenczyk, Bordia, Bordia & Chapman, 2015	1152	The current research explicitly demonstrated the delicate interplay between self-control and perceived aggressive work culture in influencing whether revenge […] will actually lead to aggressive behaviors.	Yes
JoM	Ng & Feldman, 2015	922	The current study demonstrates to managers that i-deals are related to at least one important component of performance.	
JoM	Ben-Oz & Greve, 2015	1848	Firms that do poorly will invest more.	Yes
APJoM	Ouyang, Lam & Wang, 2015	687	Our findings indicate that female and male subordinates respond differently to abusive supervision.	

| EMR | Pina e Cunha, Clegg, Rego & Gomes, 2015 | 55 | Sensemaking is critically downgraded by barriers to information flows, lack of social interaction, and a sense of alienation in one's organization. | |

Table 6: Examples of synthetic propositions.

Appendix A: An Example of Coding Principles Applied to an Actual IFP Section of a Scholarly Management Journal

Below is an actual example of an IFP section (heading included), the analysis of which illustrates how this study's coding principles applied.

"**Practical implications**

The findings suggest that individual affect can be influenced not only by individual treatment but also by how the work unit is treated (i.e., justice climate) because of emotional contagion. Group affective tone is also related to justice climate. Organizations need to ensure fair treatment to groups or departments to avoid the spread of negative emotions within the group and negative reactions from employees.

In realizing that affect and group affective tone influence individual attitudes and behavior, managers should find ways to arouse positive affect of employees and diffuse it to others. For example, positive reinforcers (material or psychosocial) should be provided to employees when they gain some achievement and transmit good news through different formal and informal channels. It would also be useful to organize some social events for employees to share happiness. Although some negative emotions in the workplace are unavoidable, managers should be sensitive to employees' negative emotions and stop their diffusion. Rumors should be clarified before they spread." (Lin 2015: 794)

The first paragraph opens with a sentence that combines, in this order, a nonsensical statement with an analytic one (the reasons for these classifications will be provided). According to the sixth principle, the entire sentence classifies as nonsensical. Further, according to the fifth principle, which states that no synthetic proposition can follow from a non-synthetic one, the rest of the paragraph is ignored. All the sentences of the second paragraph rely on the verb form 'should'; according to the fourth principle, they are therefore

considered as inconsequential and as such ignored. Hence, for present purposes, the article's entire IFP section, which contains eight sentences forming two paragraphs, reduces to one nonsensical proposition.

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2.10 : The language of power and authority in leadership

Full Length Article

The language of power and authority in leadership

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to provide insight into how leaders obtain their power through language use. The thesis defended is that, at its best, the language of power in leadership activates specific linguistic functions in prescribed ways. This thesis draws on three subordinate arguments. First, to the extent that leadership is a relationship resting on voluntary obedience, it is through a process of authorisation that leaders obtain their power. Second, the way language functions are instantiated in communication determines whether social interactions are authoritative or authoritarian. The view advanced is that noble language characterises the former, base language the latter. Third and consequently, the power of leaders develops from their use of noble language. Contrasting examples illuminate this article's thesis. An agenda for leadership research and education is then outlined.

Introduction

Max Weber (1947) defined power as the potential of one person to impose his will on another, irrespective of the other person's desires and resistance. As such, he believed that power entered almost all social relationships and was therefore too diffuse a construct to be useful in social science. Thus, as an alternative, Weber preferred to work with the notion of 'rule': the probability that commands from a person will be obeyed by a specified group. His perspective became influential. Indeed, it provided impetus for later writers to concentrate on questions of how and by whom power is exercised over people and associated matters concerning domination and subordination (Spillane & Joullié, 2015: 203–204).

Bertrand Russel (1938: 9–10) entertained an even more encompassing understanding of power than Weber's. He posited that power is the fundamental construct in social science in the same way that energy is for physical science. In his book, however, Russell did not substantiate his grandiose conception and fell back on Weber's view that power is the production of intended effects by some people over others. Further, Russell did not distinguish situations where people obey a power holder involuntarily from those where they obey voluntarily.

In following Weber, Russell set something of a precedent. That is, as noted by Sturm and Antonakis (2015), most authors who wrote on power after Weber embraced the idea that power is over people and is fundamentally a question of domination and submission, freedom and restraint. This view has been for instance adopted by such well-known power theorists as French and Raven (1959), Simon (1997) and Lukes (2005). It is noteworthy that such a perspective is rooted in the subjectivity of those individuals over whom power is allegedly directed. Indeed, it includes as exemplars instances where people claim (rightly or wrongly) to be dominated or otherwise affected by someone else. The conception of power as exercised over people, irrespective of the means through which it is established, has two notable and interrelated implications. First, it conflates power and influence. Second, as is the case for Russell's conception, it does not allow for a distinction between involuntary and voluntary obedience.

In recent years, Sturm and Antonakis (2015: 139) have pushed ahead on understanding the nature of interpersonal power. They proposed that it has three subcomponents: agency, means and ability to enforce one's will. Among the means through which interpersonal power is exercised, they listed charisma, expertise, incentives and punishment. When applied to leadership, Sturm and Antonakis' (2015) analysis prompts inquiry into the ways leaders establish, maintain and exercise their ability to control what followers do while allowing them to retain their own agency (or have the impression that they do so). In the case of charismatic leadership, why and how "followers [...] willingly succumb to the leader's influence" (Antonakis, Bastardoz, Jacquart, & Shamir, 2016: 304) become focal concerns, complicated by the fact that

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attributions of charisma stem from characteristics of both leaders and followers (Antonakis et al., 2016; Fanelli & Misangyi, 2006).

The present article focuses on how leaders invoke language to secure power over followers. Specifically, the following pages examine how both the content and structure of language are a means of distinguishing leadership from other types of relationships in which one party is subordinate (this term broadly conceived) to another. The thesis to be defended is that, when at its best, the language of leadership activates linguistic functions in specific ways. This thesis is supported by three related subordinate arguments. First, to the extent that leadership is a relationship entailing voluntary obedience, it develops from the authority that leaders, as speakers, seek and that followers, as listeners, concede. It is through such an authorisation process that leaders obtain their power. Second, the way language functions are instantiated in oral and written communication determines whether that communication promotes critical argument, authority and responsibility, or if it is more aptly classified as authoritarian. Following Weaver (1985), the position advanced here is that, in their fullest expression, noble language characterises the former, base language the latter. Third and consequently, a leader's power develops from noble language, as practised between aspiring leaders and followers, or, at least, from followers' perception that such language is enacted by the leader. In summary, the present article shows that studying the language of leadership by analysing its content and structure, as these are co-constructed by leaders and followers, illuminates how each party builds and upholds its role in the relationship and recognises that of its counterpart.

Five sections follow the present introduction. The first focuses on the relationship between the constructs of leadership and language to set the stage for the remainder of the article. The second section delineates general characteristics of leadership situations. It examines them through the prism of authority and power relationships as regulated by noble and base language. The third section is a more focused examination of the difference between noble and base language and presents a linguistic framework drawing on this distinction. The fourth section applies the linguistic framework to contrasting conversations. A discussion on the research and educational implications of the proposed model ensues. This discussion highlights the methodological advantages of focusing on the role of language in leadership research.

Leadership and language

'Leadership' is an abstract noun which denotes a relationship. Hence, as a point of methodology, there is no 'thing' (tangible entity) called leadership. Rather, when the phenomenon is manifest, there is an interaction, an encounter, that takes place between individuals, which cannot be scrutinised outside of its linguistic, cultural and moral contexts. Although personal characteristics of leaders and followers can be inferred from the way particular cases of leadership emerge and unfold, such elements cannot be fully explicative (DeRue & Ashford, 2010: 627–628). If they were so, leadership could be explained without reference to the other party in the leader-follower dyad and consideration of context. To appreciate why this position is untenable, the analogy of marriage is instructive. Indeed, one cannot develop a full understanding of this relationship through studying either 'wives' or 'husbands' as if these parties existed independently of the affiliation they have with each other (an affiliation which defines them as wives and husbands), what they expect from it and other circumstantial elements. Such an observation is an indictment of much leadership research, insofar as it establishes the personality of leaders as its focal concern.

Although agreement is rare within the leadership literature, 'traditional' as well as 'critical' authors mostly accept that leadership, including charismatic leadership, is a co-constructed relationship (Antonakis et al., 2016; Clifton, 2017; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Fairhurst, 2009; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Tourish, 2014; Tourish & Jackson, 2008). As such, leadership survives and disappears through communication between leaders and followers (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Accordingly,

leadership scholars have focused much of their research effort on leaders' discourses and how these shape perception, whether intentionally (e.g. Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Kotter, 2012) or unintentionally (Calás & Smircich, 1991; Collinson, 2005; Fanelli, Misangyi, & Tosi, 2009). The same researchers also typically acknowledge that leaders manifest themselves through action, by example. Actions, however, can be established as exemplary only if they are imbued with meaning. Furthermore, the notion of shared meaning implies a priori the activation of a communication process invoking use of language (Smircich & Morgan, 1982; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005), itself a form of action (Gronn, 1983).

The study of discourse entails analysis of language use, the way cognition (beliefs, ideas, etc.) is communicated and the social situations where communicative events unfold, taking account of who speaks, why and when (van Dijk, 1997: 2). To the extent that they have recognised the central role of communication in leadership, researchers have mostly limited their investigations to the last two elements of discourse analysis (cognition and situation), at the expense of the first (language use). That is, if scholars have analysed what leaders and followers say and why they say it, in comparative terms, they have neglected the role of language (words and phraseology) in leadership situations. For example, neither *The Oxford Handbook of Leadership and Organizations*, *The Oxford Handbook of Leadership*, *The SAGE Handbook of Leadership* nor *The Oxford Handbook of Leader-Member Exchange* dedicates a single chapter (out of a combined total of one hundred and twenty-four chapters) to language in leadership.

In line with the generally accepted view that leadership is contingent and contextual (Oc, 2018), in the rare cases where scholars have studied the role of language, they have typically limited their investigations to specific situations. For instance, Lowenhaupt (2014) explored how school principals use language to enact change and van de Mieroop & Schnurr (2014) studied how leadership language shapes performance appraisal interviews. Larsson and Lundholm (2010) analysed the role of language in daily leadership exchanges in a bank and Baxter (2015) examined how leadership language differs depending on the sex composition of teams. Another and more recent example of linguistic analyses of a particular leadership situation is by Gerpott, Lehmann-Willenbrock, Voelpel, and van Vugt (2019), who investigated the conditions in which oral communication produces emergent leadership in self-managed teams. Each of these studies implies that the words and phraseology leaders and followers use is strictly situation specific. Hence, as far as language use is concerned, one could be forgiven for concluding that the only thing of consequence that leadership situations have in common is the shared embrace of, for example, English. As such, given the central role of communication in leadership situations, an absence of any discernible higher order distinguishing pattern would mean that these encounters are in fact incommensurable. If this kind of absence were established, speaking of leadership situations would be ill-conceived. The alternative is the view that there exists a feature of language that is common to leadership situations. It is to the identification and analysis of this common feature of leadership language that the present article is dedicated.

As a particular type of leadership situation, scholars have also examined the language of charismatic leadership (Den Hartog & Verburg, 1997; Fanelli et al., 2009; Fiol, Harris, & House, 1999; Heracleous & Klaering, 2014; Shamir, Arthur, & House, 1994). Noting that charisma is rooted in rhetorical mastery, Shamir et al. (1994) identified several features of charismatic language. Specifically, they concluded that it emphasises the historical background of the situation in which leaders and followers find themselves, insists on the values and moral justifications the parties collectively embrace and seeks to strengthen followers' belief in their ability to deliver the future outlined by their leader.

The analysis of Shamir et al. (1994) is consistent with the definition of charisma later proposed by Antonakis et al. (2016: 304), for whom it is "values-based, symbolic, and emotion-laden leader signaling." Accordingly, charismatic language seduces those to whom it is directed

by calling on shared values, the emotional force of which is irresistible. It is noteworthy that the findings of Shamir et al. (1994) are also compatible with the view, common in the relevant literature, that the language of leaders generally (and of charismatic leaders specifically) is too powerful a tool to be trusted. Such a perspective establishes a leader's language as a means of deception used to mislead as much as to lead. For example, Fairhurst and Sarr (1996: xi) embrace this conception when they assert that "the ease with which [leaders] speak causes listeners to miss the fact that language cloaks, sedates, even seduces people into believing that many of the so-called facts of our world are objectively rather than socially created."

In summary, leadership scholars have generally assumed that leaders, especially charismatic leaders, are necessarily effective language users but have not focused research effort on delineating the nature of the relationship between language and leadership. Exceptions to this observation include, in addition to those mentioned earlier, Bligh & Robinson (2010), Bligh and Hess (2007), Morrell (2006), Cuno (2005), Gronn (1983) and Pondy (1978). However, notwithstanding these contributions, researchers who have analysed language's role in leadership contexts have mostly neglected the bidirectional nature of interaction between leaders and followers (Crossman & Crossman, 2011). Such literature de-emphasises followers' agency. That is, as noted in Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003: 1439), researchers have typically assumed that leaders do all the talking (that matters) whereas followers do most of the listening. As is typical in analyses of charismatic leadership, the two aforementioned assumptions (leaders are good language users and are the only ones whose talk matters) are frequently evident in scholarship addressing transformational leadership (see Antonakis et al., 2016 for a distinction between charismatic and transformational leadership). Indeed, there is little chance that individuals "stimulate or inspire [others to] achieve extraordinary outcomes" (Bass & Riggio, 2014: 3) if they are not articulate and compelling communicators to whose force of speech listeners can only submit.

Underdeveloped understanding of the role of language in leadership situations is consequential. Indeed, if, as is proposed by DeRue and Ashford (2010), leadership rests on a process whereby each party dynamically claims, establishes and maintains its respective identity while granting the other its own, then comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon requires consideration of language use. This article showcases such an undertaking and reveals how words and phraseology shape each party's role and delineates respective areas of (ir)responsibility. However, before such an endeavour is possible, a discussion of leadership, obedience, authority and power is necessary.

Leadership, obedience, authority and noble language

Leadership and obedience

As a relational construct, leadership refers to a crucial factor in the interaction between leaders and followers that distinguishes leadership from other relationships such as rulership or management. Leadership, rulership and managerial relationships involve obedience (acceptance of directions). In the cases of rulership and management, this obedience is voluntary or involuntary. However, insofar as leadership is concerned, there is widespread implicit agreement among scholars that the phenomenon rests exclusively on voluntary obedience (for an explicit formulation, see Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003: 1436). Such accommodation on the part of followers derives from agreement with their leaders and manifests in subsequent cooperation (Choi & Schnurr, 2014; Holmes, 2007; Kort, 2008; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). As such, when a leadership relationship exists, followers are neither subjects nor subordinates: they do not obey but agree and follow. If leaders coerced others, they would not be called leaders but, depending on the situation under analysis, dictators, autocrats, bullies, police officers, managers or other terms associated with those who can force others into behaving in certain ways.

Two salient conclusions derive from the discussion so far. First, if leadership does not exist outside of co-constructed communication processes, then leadership situations cannot be grasped outside of a linguistic analysis of these processes (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Heracleous & Barett, 2001). Indeed, if what makes leadership distinctive is voluntary obedience, then leadership is mediated through the ability of leaders and followers to communicate in ways that both parties find meaningful and convincing. As such, the persuasive element in leadership communications renders leadership a fundamentally linguistically mediated relationship. Second, if one obeys a ruler but follows a leader, an analysis of leadership is incomplete without distinguishing between power and authority, an exercise that is often neglected in scholarly musings. It is to this delineation that the discussion now turns.

Power and authority

If power is the ability to bring events to pass, authority is concerned with rights and duties. The two constructs (power and authority) are often present simultaneously and work synergistically. Indeed, in relationships involving superintendence, power and authority normally coincide. However, might is not right, coercion is not cooperation, to comply is not to endorse and authoritarian does not mean authoritative. These observations reveal that the notions of power and authority merit distinction, an exercise that leadership scholars rarely undertake.

A reason for confusion between power and authority is that the latter term is prone to equivocation. As will be explained, in one sense, common in scholarly literature and in everyday parlance, the term refers to a form of power, sometimes called 'formal power' (as in 'a police officer is an authority figure'). The second usage of the word 'authority', sometimes referred to as 'informal power', embraces psychosocial as well as subjective and concessional elements (as in 'Steven Hawking was an authority on quantum physics'). This latter usage links authority to authorisation but entails a constant, or at least a regular, evaluative process. It is noteworthy that the second perspective of authority, which rests on authorisation, remains compatible with authority viewed as a form of power. Indeed, individuals cannot impose authority (as a form of power) by themselves. Rather, prior to being able to do so, they must have it externally conceded.

Some authors are unambiguously committed to the view that authority is merely a form of power. For example, Robbins, Bergman and Coulter (2018: 656) defined authority as 'the rights inherent in a managerial position to tell people what to do and to expect them to do it.' Authority is here attached to jobs (and not to job holders) and its manifestation is essentially the capacity to control. Similarly, even though Simon (1997: 135-136) held that authority obtains from experience, training, objectivity and logic, he also averred that when "disagreement is not resolved by discussion, persuasion, or other means of conviction, then it must be decided by the authority of one or the other participant" (Simon, 1997: 182). Indeed, in Simon's (1997: 201) view, authority "is only one of a number of forms of influence [...] that does not seek to convince [...] but only obtain [...] acquiescence."

Despite Simon's insistence, so-called 'arguments from authority' are limited in their capacity to convince. Rather, in most circumstances, to obtain acquiescence, reasons are expected and provided in support of suggestions, recommendations and orders. Indeed, recognised experts as well as people in positions of power typically offer at least a threshold level of rationale and justification to buttress their views and increase the likelihood that their communications are understood and thus properly executed. Such phenomena led Barnard (1958: 163) to define "authority [as] the character of a communication [...] by virtue of which it is accepted." Seen from this perspective, the assent of a person to whom a communication is addressed is a necessary condition for its establishment as authoritative (Riaz, Buchanan, & Ruebottom, 2016: 1534–1535). In matters of work and employment, Barnard (1958: 165) maintained, employees assent to and comply with a management order only when conditions are verified. Notably, it is necessary that

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they understand the direction, believe it to be consistent with organisational purpose and see it as compatible with their interests.

Friedrich (1963: 127-130) critiqued Barnard's theory of authority. He argued that obedience obtained by way of subjugation is distinguishable from obedience obtained through cooperation, a term Friedrich noted Barnard left undefined. For Friedrich (1963: 269), communications are authoritative when they are capable of 'reasoned elaboration,' that is, when those who utter them regularly elaborate a reasoning that is accepted by others to whom such messages apply. Authority is understood here as the Romans conceived of 'auctoritas' as 'augmentation,' the addition of wisdom to will, of reason to preference (Friedrich, 1963: 218-219). By contrast, when there is no dialogue or debate, when no reasoning is presented, the authority of the powerholder disintegrates. In such circumstances, cooperation concedes ground to coercion and democracy edges towards autocracy (Friedrich, 1963: 507ff).

Defining authority as capacity for reasoned elaboration allowed Friedrich (1963: 236-237) to criticise Weber (1947) for equating authority with legitimacy. For Friedrich, authority legitimises power because the capacity to issue communications, supported by a convincing rationale, creates the right to rule. In this sense, authority supports legitimacy. As such, it is not legitimate power as Weber thought, because legitimate power exists in various forms without a capacity for reasoned elaboration. What is missing in such instances is a rationale for obeying, a demonstration or a conviction that those who want to be obeyed can successfully direct others towards a common objective. When those seeking to be obeyed do not offer justifications for their utterances, when they use jargon or attempt to intimidate or force their views onto their listeners without dialogue and elaboration, their communications are in fact orders. These kinds of exchanges do not produce cooperation. Rather, they are better characterised as encounters where one party, typically the dominant one, seeks authoritarian control.

If, as Barnard and Friedrich held, authority is what makes communications acceptable, then the designation of a communication as authoritative rests with the individuals to whom it is directed, not with the person who issued it. That is, authority comes from below because it is conceded by those to whom it applies. It is a mandate to command, an authorisation granted by others (which in some cases entails a temporary suspension of dissent) that a persistent disagreement dissolves. By contrast, power does not presuppose agreement. In and of itself, power is morally neutral but its uses are morally evaluated and found to be in accord (or not) with authority. Indeed, one can have the power to do things and in particular to force others to act in certain ways without being authorised to do so. In other words, authority is a source of power, but the converse is not true: power is not a source of authority (Spillane & Spillane, 1999).

Combining Friedrich's understanding of authority with the preceding analysis of leadership and obedience creates the first of this article's subordinate arguments: the language of leadership (that is, the language that leaders and followers speak in their exchanges) is a language of authority sought and of authority granted. Aspiring leaders establish, then maintain, their authority and aspiring followers authorise their leaders. It is through such a co-constructed authorisation process that leaders obtain their power. The distinctive element in leader communication is therefore its perceived ability to be reasonably elaborated. In this sense, a leader's power is conditional on the concession of authority made by followers; more specifically, it is shaped and limited by such concession (Spillane & Joullié, 2015: x-xi).

Friedrich (1972: 80-81) noted that reasoned elaboration is not universally valued and practised by speakers and their listeners. Indeed, speakers are regularly allowed to communicate in ways which appear to proceed from, or to be capable of, reasoned elaboration when in fact such elaboration is absent, illusory or dubious. Stanley Milgram's (1963) well-known obedience study is a compelling example of mere appearance of reasoned elaboration. Specifically, in the experiment, the psychologist repeatedly instructs the subject (the 'teacher') to continue with the study's protocol despite apparent protests from the 'learner' to whom electric shocks are allegedly inflicted. No elaborated justification is provided for persisting with such apparent cruelty, aside from the giving of assurances that the jolts (which range from 'slight' to 'very severe') will not inflict 'permanent damage' and that responsibility for harm caused to the 'learner' remains with the researcher. Advanced by a person pursuing scientific research within a prestigious university environment, such vacuous rationale was accepted by most subjects (the 'teachers'). In so doing, they (the subjects) granted authority to the researcher and accepted his unrelenting instruction to proceed with the experiment. It is noteworthy, however, that Milgram's subjects were not only implicitly misled by the study's justification but were also explicitly deceived. For example, they were told that: the experiment was about memory and learning and not obedience; electric shocks were being inflicted when in fact that was not the case; and the process by which 'learner' and 'teacher' roles were assigned was random, whereas it was actually rigged so that the subject was always the 'teacher.'

Authority as reasoned elaboration takes several forms. For example, analysis of cargo cults (and the emergence of charismatic leaders therein) provides evidence that these phenomena are, at least partly, the result of an overt display of intellectual effort aimed at solving ostensibly insoluble problems. Such situations provide support to Andreski's (1988) thesis that it is rational to follow a person who promises to address a consequential dilemma. Indeed, the contextual elements which accompany the rise of charismatic leaders nearly always include purported solutions to what appear to be (and often are) vexing existential concerns. Moreover, these remedies are typically proposed by individuals who support their claims with calls to mystical or extraordinary experience or unique supernatural insight (Spillane & Martin, 2018: 113-119).

If authority in Friedrich's sense (as reasoned elaboration) is reconcilable with Andreski's view on charismatics, it is also compatible with charisma seen as value-based, emotional symbolic signalling (Antonakis et al., 2016). This compatibility arises because emotional commitment and calls to values can be readily added to authoritative communications (i.e., communications that would pass the test of critical evaluation on their own). Although it is tempting to call charismatic authority 'irrational,' Friedrich (1972: 53) counselled against such labelling. Indeed, attempts to associate authority with the irrational miss the aforementioned fundamental point that authority necessarily entails some appeal to reason. However, notwithstanding that there is always a degree of reasoning and hence of rationality involved in authority-based relationships, only the authoritative communication can be reasonably elaborated.

Noble and base language

Building on a distinction originally advanced by Plato and Aristotle, American philosopher Richard Weaver (1985) delineated two forms of language, noble and base. He argued that noble language supports critical thinking and clear communication. Noble speakers use words and phraseology to clarify ambiguous circumstances and replace destructive beliefs with constructive and self-promoting ones. Overall, noble speakers empower their listeners by showing them better versions of themselves (Weaver, 1985: 25). In contrast to noble language, base language undermines courage and erodes liberty and dignity. Base speakers habitually seek to manipulate those who listen to them. To do so, they lie, misrepresent, deceive, confuse and exaggerate problems to elicit or exacerbate feelings of despair. The language Milgram (1963) used when communicating with his subjects qualifies as an instantiation of base language.

Unlike his ancient predecessors, Weaver (1985: 6) argued that the distinction between noble and base language is not dichotomous but is rather characterised by gradation and thus provides for a continuum of psychological and behavioural effects. Weaver (1970) also conceived

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of language as inherently value-laden and as such sermonic. In his view, all speakers are preachers. Specifically, through their communications they move others either to superior or inferior versions of themselves. Furthermore, if one accepts Szasz's (1977: 14-19) view that thinking is an internal dialogue and as such a form of self-talk, Weaver's typology implies that speakers are not immune from the effects of their own language.

Effectiveness of language is not the criterion that establishes it as either noble or base. For example, Weaver (1985: 20-21) held that Winston Churchill and Adolf Hitler were both effective speakers – the former noble, the latter base. Noble and base speakers are equally able to induce their audience into accepting directions, but these exchanges differ in a crucial respect. Specifically, listeners equipped with critical thinking skill typically accept speakers' communications only after probing evaluation. By contrast, listeners unwilling or unable to engage in such examination are likely to fall prey to base speakers and submit to their communication. Such a potential divergence in listener response assists with understanding why the German audiences of the 1930s fell under the spell of Hitler's speeches, whereas the British audiences after 1945 found Churchill's discourses lacking the persuasive force of his wartime exhortations.

The difference between noble and base language is particularly evident in situations where those who have granted authority (in Friedrich's sense, as a source of power) to a speaker know they can withdraw it at any time. However, when language is used to control individuals and deprive them of their choice to obey, the notions of authority and power merge in the construct of 'authoritarian.' As Friedrich pressed against Barnard, the difference between authority and power, that is, between assent and obedience, does matter. If this distinction is unacknowledged or blurred, then that between the constructs of cooperation and control is similarly obscured. How best to recognise these delineations becomes clearer when analysing the functions of language and the antithetical values each such function can take.

Language functions and values

Linguists have elucidated and described language's functions. For instance, Bühler (2011 [1934]) proposed three functions of language: the *expressive*, which consists of an outward summary presentation of an inner emotional state; the *signalling*, which aims to elicit a reaction from others; and the *descriptive*, which pertains to statements concerning the perception of things. Bühler organised these functions into a hierarchy on the basis that signalling entails expression while describing incorporates both expression and signalling. He further proposed that each takes either of two possible antithetical values: expression is either revealing or concealing, signalling is either effective or ineffective and descriptions are empirically either true or false (factual or not).

Popper (1996: 295) augmented Bühler's hierarchy by proposing a fourth language function: the *argumentative*. His rationale for this addition is that an argument serves as an expression because it indexes an internal state. It is also a signal. As such, it typically provokes a response from whomever receives and considers it. Furthermore, insofar as it is about something or someone, an argument is descriptive. Finally, there is the argumentative function proper, the giving of reasons for holding a specific view.

Aside from those introduced by his augmented conception, Popper acknowledged that other language functions exist but did not identify them. Spillane (1987) addressed this omission through adding two higher order functions to the linguistic hierarchy: the *advisory* and the *promissory*. Specifically, given that recommendations require reasons, the advisory function entails the argumentative function. Furthermore, statements of the type 'you should' (advice) presuppose 'you can' (a proposition that embeds two descriptions: 'you are allowed to' and 'you are able to'), showing that the descriptive level is below the

A hierarchy of language functions and values; adapted from Spillane (1987).

Level	Language function	Content	Value(s)	
			Noble	Base
5	Promissory	Intentions	Responsibility	Non-responsibility
4	Advisory	Recommendations	Authoritative	Authoritarian
3	Argumentative	Justifications	Autonomy	Heteronomy
2	Descriptive	Descriptions	Truth	Falsehood
1	Expressive	Inner states	Revealing	Concealing

advisory level in the hierarchy. Finally, intentions or promises rest on recommendations (e.g. 'I will' implies 'I should').

Table 1 presents a summary of the complete proposed linguistic hierarchy, with its levels, their content and respective possible antithetical values (for the sake of simplification, the signalling function has been merged with the descriptive function). Following Bühler and Popper, the functions of language are rank ordered (and arranged vertically) according to the principle of logical entailment which is that, when using language, it is not possible to operate at a given echelon of the hierarchy without incorporating all subordinate levels.

Apart from the conception (summarised in Table 1) presented in this article, other linguistic frameworks exist, such as those advanced by Chomsky (1956) or Jakobson (1960). These alternative frameworks are not germane to the current argument for two reasons. First, each places less emphasis than Popper's and Spillane's classifications on the argumentative and promissory functions, both crucial to the current analysis of leadership as a relationship grounded on authority and giving voice to responsibility. Second, insofar as linguistic functions are concerned, the principle of logical entailment (which justifies the hierarchy), that Bühler (2011) identified is necessary for an analysis which seeks to account for leadership as the culmination of communicative processes.

The remainder of this section develops the second of this article's three subordinate arguments: the way language functions are activated determines whether a particular exchange, in its archetypal form, promotes authority and responsibility, or whether it signals an attempt at control and conveys irresponsibility. Throughout the discussion, exemplars are provided to facilitate understanding. These have been extracted (or slightly adapted) from an exchange reproduced later in the article.

Expressing – The language of feelings

The expressive function of language is on the lowest level of the hierarchy in Table 1 because it is the most elementary form of language. An expressive statement is the voicing of an inner state pertaining to feelings, moods or emotions. Expressive language is also the least regulated by linguistic conventions: for example, mere shouts convey feelings. Expressive statements are either revealing (sincere) or concealing (insincere) depending on whether they match with the inner state of the person who makes them. However, such correspondence is inherently private and thus inscrutable. Indeed, only individuals who utter an expressive statement know if it reflects their inner state.

In the current postmodern era where the expression of feelings is sought and accepted (Zembylas, 2006), aspiring leaders have little choice but to ensure that the content of their expressions is consistent with their overall behaviour and prevailing relevant norms. For example, to convince investors, market analysts and the public of the value of her firm's purportedly innovative blood testing technology, Elizabeth Holmes confected her voice, changing it into a baritone (Carreyrou, 2018: 98). This tactic was effective for her, at least for some time. However, if inconsistency between expression and other communications of aspiring leaders is unduly salient, followers are inclined to question

their integrity and intentions and consequently resist their attempts to establish authority.

Describing – The language of truth

The descriptive function of language conveys representational accounts of the world. Observational statements (e.g. "you have constantly preached against violence") are deemed to be true in circumstances where others report compatible descriptions. Descriptive statements convey data but can fail to trigger responses (i.e., be ineffective) even when they accurately portray reality. They can be incomplete, imprecise, or offered in terms that are insufficiently suggestive for their audience to appreciate their content, meaning or importance.

Accuracy and effectiveness of descriptions are essential dimensions of a communication that aims at authority. Although speakers may misrepresent reality to their listeners, communications about specific situations will not be accepted if they are not conveyed with some degree of clarity or if they have no empirical credibility. This requirement holds even if some listeners suspend disbelief longer than others, especially when it is in their interest to do so. Religious and cult leaders do not escape the necessity to ground their claims in experience. They often deal with this imperative through claiming, for example, that they are in relationships with supernatural beings, perhaps supporting such assertions with accounts of mystical experiences (dreams, visions, trances, etc.). Alternatively, they may deliver visual 'proofs' of their special powers, for instance by creating the illusion that they make lame people walk or that they are able to turn water into wine. If charisma is understood in the religious sense, as a spellbinding personal feature or supernatural 'gift from God' (see for instance 1 Corinthians 12–14) with which the speaker is endowed, spectacular displays of these kinds are typical features of charismatic leadership.

Arguing – The language of autonomy

The argumentative function of language concerns the articulation of reasons to justify conclusions. In the language hierarchy, it sits above the descriptive function because it is possible to argue about descriptions. Moreover, because it necessitates a degree of representation, an argument entails description. An argument also serves as an expression because it is a manifestation of a person's internal state. The following example illuminates the subordinate elements of an argument: "that you have broken the law has made it impossible for any government to leave you at liberty."

Arguing is the language of autonomy because arguments are a means of evaluating communications and determining their trustworthiness. Valid critical arguments (adhering to, for example, standard Aristotelian forms) clarify problems, debunk fallacies, reveal biases and expose lies. Critical thinkers unmask autocrats, pseudo-experts advancing reasoning based on faulty data and others who, for various motives, seek to make issues appear unduly complex. Arguing dispels misconceptions, protects against manipulation and as such supports autonomy. Conversely, absence or weakness of critical inquiry leads to confusion, psychological dependence and ultimately manipulation and control. When reason and logic are de-emphasised, arguments cannot be competently assessed and capacity for independent judgement is undermined. For this reason, Winston Smith, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell, 2008), is tortured until he admits (i.e., is convinced) that two plus two equals five. After his ordeal, he must defer to higher powers on consequential matters, including those concerning the elementary application of logical principles. In other words, Winston Smith is now under State control because he can no longer reason independently.

Autonomy develops from and in turn supports argument. It is through arguing that individuals become aware of possibilities. Indeed, it is the critical evaluation of conclusions through scrutiny of their assumptions, premises and reasoning that gives rise to alternative hypotheses about reality. Such processes are the foundations of

intellectual emancipation, individual as well as collective. In this vein, Popper (1962, 1996) advanced that acceptance and cultivation of argument and the widespread possibility of critical and probing scrutiny are the hallmarks of scientific inquiry and distinguish open (liberal) from totalitarian societies.

Although there are individuals ready to entertain their audience with extraordinary tales, optical illusions and sleights of hand accepted by gullible spectators, others reject claims that magic intervenes in natural affairs or that reality's course can be supernaturally altered in favour of particular interests. Specifically, those who argue *de facto* provide explanations and justifications for the views they advance, limiting their claims to what can be done and is in principle replicable by others. When provided, such explanations dissolve misunderstandings, clarify ambiguities, enhance the validity of the solutions proposed and thus support authority. Such endeavour activates the argumentative function of language.

Leaders and followers benefit from developing their arguing skills. On the one hand, being a strong arguer enables aspiring leaders to convince those they seek to lead of the adequacy of their views without having recourse to lies, obfuscation, deception or manipulation. On the other hand, followers skilled in arguing see through attempts by those who want to lead them to act in these ways. Moreover, because descriptive language is often complicated by the use of metaphors, emotional undertones and moral values, valid argument clarifies communication and thus enhances or weakens authority. Why arguments support or undermine authority becomes clearer when analysing advisory language.

Advising – The language of authority

The advisory function, in the language hierarchy, is above the arguing function because justification (the providing of reasons) is a prerequisite for recommendations to be acceptable. Even if authority and reasoning are inextricably linked, as Friedrich (1963: 126) asserted, rationality is sufficient but not necessary to establish authority. Indeed, when supported by empirically established premises and logic, the advice-giver's parlance acquires a compelling quality that is otherwise lacking and becomes authoritative in and of itself. As mentioned, however, leaders, especially religious ones, frequently call on mystical or transcendental beliefs to secure their authority. Hence, to the extent that they are successful, such communications attest that there is more to authority than mere rational argumentation.

In cases where reasoning starts with empirical points of reference and proceeds according to the principles of logic, persuasion is normally unnecessary. When logical arguments based on empirical premises are not available or fail to convince, however, persuasion becomes necessary. Indeed, when the issue at hand has emotional or moral dimensions, when personal interests are at stake, or again when there are personal relationships between speakers and listeners, pure logic is typically rendered less potent or even irrelevant. In fact, there are cases where an exclusive reliance on logic is counterproductive in that it is perceived as impersonal and arrogant. In these circumstances, strict rational reasoning is not the vehicle of authority and speakers need to consider opinion (known or probable) of the majority of hearers. They also need to take account of existing relationships between listeners and speakers, as well as of how the former perceive the latter. Indeed, as revealed by Shamir et al. (1994), those situations where emotion and moral considerations dominate are crucial contextual elements for the manifestation of charismatic leadership. Thus, when speakers convince their listeners by using emotions either to defeat or buttress rationality, they secure authority.

Whatever the exact situation, mastery of language is crucial to establishing and protecting authority from challenges or surprise attacks in debates. Not only must those seeking authority know what to say (i.e., they should be knowledgeable about matters at hand), they must also know how to say it. For similar reasons, competence with language

is the followers' best defence because it is through language that they will counter attempts to assert domination. Specifically, they can challenge aspiring leaders' communications from two distinct yet connected angles. First, consent cannot be coerced ('I comply' does not imply 'I agree'): granting authority remains a choice. Individuals can refuse to grant authority in the name of personal independence or accept to do so in the name of group effectiveness. One's idiosyncratic preference for either independence or submission, that is, between either preserving autonomy or accepting heteronomy, informs such a choice (Spillane & Joullié, 2015). Second, advising requires the adoption of an ethical perspective (that which justifies the objective that the advice-giver proposes to meet and the associated means to reach it) and the associated expectation that others share or accept it. An example of advice where the ethical perspective is explicitly outlined is the following: "The only solution for you is either to resign and thus dissociate yourself from evil, if you feel that the law you are called upon to administer is an evil, or to inflict the severest penalty, if you believe that the law you are assisting to administer is good."

The value judgements that underlie advising are typically kept implicit. Aspiring or established leaders can therefore be accused of manipulating their followers into adopting their values under the guise of advising, that is, via a language of authority (for a discussion on this theme in a managerial context, see Maclagan, 2007). Even when this duplicity is not their intention, as Spillane (1987: 221) notes, the fact remains that the language of advice includes expressions like 'should,' 'ought to,' 'in your interest' and others of comparable meaning. Such language is easily confused with a language of power, especially when one party in the relationship dominates the other within the broader social order. It is also possible that the values informing the speaker's language become outdated within a changing moral context, as often happens when there is a generational difference between speaker and listeners. A similar disconnect arises when speakers and listeners do not share the same cultural background. In such cases, listeners do not embrace the values embedded in the arguments advanced by (for example) the 'old one' or 'the foreigner.' Avenues are thus available to listeners to dismiss speakers' attempts to establish authority and if value-based charisma was present, it now disappears. If the leaders are incumbent rulers or managers, their language loses effectiveness and their authority withers. In such circumstances, the obedience of others, which used to be voluntary, becomes progressively involuntary.

Promising – The language of responsibility

The promissory function of language is at the apex of Table 1's hierarchy because its activation incorporates the utilisation of all other levels. A promise represents a commitment to engage (or not) in an action based upon a recommendation made at minimum to oneself. An example is the following: 'If the course of events should make it possible to release you, I will do so.' Not all promises are of equal value. For instance, those supported by true descriptions, sound arguments and authoritative recommendations are preferable to others because they are more likely to be carried out and bring about expected consequences. Such considerations illustrate that promising, autonomy and responsibility are overlapping constructs. However, they are not synonymous. Specifically, autonomy is established in the language of argument; responsibility, that is, the understanding, acceptance and respect of obligations, is expressed in the language of promises.

Authority is not an end in itself: it is a means to an end. In the case of leadership, the authorisation granted by followers is, for leaders, a right to act in certain ways and a mandate to command. So long as they so authorise, followers submit to the leader's directions. These directions have an objective, to which leaders and followers commit themselves. It is noteworthy that such an objective does not need to be specific and explicit. Indeed, it can remain vague, implicit or both. For example, employees can follow one of their peers and strike to protest inadequate working conditions even if they have not yet specified their grievance

and the improvements they desire. Whatever the scenario, in leadership situations, the mandate to direct followers (the leader's authority) thus comes with the understanding that the leader's directions will have the desired effect, other elements remaining equivalent or sufficiently similar. This understanding entails a promise that leaders make and that followers believe will be delivered upon. However, should leaders appear to distance themselves from their commitments (for instance by way of evasive answers to pressing questions concerning what would happen if plans fail), followers would be justified in doubting their leader's agenda, motives and competence and thus in challenging their authority. In such circumstances, leadership (if it existed) would be compromised.

Language and leader power

The third (and last) of this article's subordinate arguments can now be defended: a leader's power derives from use of noble language. The first step in prosecuting this case is to recognise that, insofar as language use is concerned, those who seek power over others have generic options which can be ordered on a spectrum. At one extreme of this continuum, speakers express themselves sincerely; describe situations accurately and comprehensively; direct their listeners' attention towards matters they believe consequential and explain why they so believe; use argument and debate to identify remedial measures; seek cooperation in solving problems and implementing solutions; and offer relevant recommendations which they allow to be challenged. Individuals who use language in this way establish their authority through treating their listeners as their intellectual and moral equivalent. In particular, they accept without reservation the responsibility that the power of their authority generates. Further, they acknowledge the existence of a conflict between the individuality and submission imperatives, in other words between autonomy and heteronomy. That is, such speakers double-down on commitment to the values underpinning their arguments and remind those they aspire to lead of the responsibility that flows from deciding to be a follower. These individuals are leaders; in Weaver's terms, they are archetypal noble language speakers.

At the opposite end of the aforementioned linguistic spectrum, individuals seeking power over others can choose to employ a language of insincere expressions, false or biased descriptions, 'alternative facts,' lies, deceptions, invalid arguments, sleights of hand or other manipulative techniques. When confronted with the consequences of their communications, these speakers shift responsibility by, for example, denying their previous statements, invoking intentionally fallacious reasoning, or insincerely ascribing agency to uncontrollable events or conspiracies. The objectives they pursue are perhaps justified, but the means they use to mobilise their listeners are duplicitous. Fully invoking base language, such individuals have not secured authority in Friedrich's (1963) sense, i.e., as reasoned elaboration. Table 2 applies Weaver's distinction between noble and base language to the language functions of Table 1.

The linguistic analysis presented in this article applies to followers as well as leaders. This point can be appreciated through invoking Kelley's (1988) conception of followership, which establishes two dimensions. First, there is whether (or not) followers adopt an active versus passive role. Second, there is whether (or not) followers exercise independent and critical thinking. These distinctions allowed Kelley to identify 'effective followers' (active, independent and critical thinkers), 'sheepish followers' (passive, dependent, uncritical thinkers) and 'alienated followers' (independent and critical thinkers who have become passive). Courtesy of the thesis presented in the present article, Kelley's behavioural typology can now be complemented with linguistic elements. That is, Kelley's independent and critical thinkers are noble speakers. As for Kelley's 'alienated followers,' they are noble speakers who have submitted to base speakers for lack of an alternative. Further, Kelley's (1988: 146) observation that leaders and followers are often the same

Table 2
The content of noble versus base language, when employed in their most developed form.

Level	Language function	Noble language conveys...	Base language conveys...
5	Promissory	Responsibility; courage.	Non-responsibility; cowardice.
4	Advisory	Authority; cooperation; understanding.	Power; control; authoritarianism.
3	Argumentative	Autonomy; critique; choices; reasons.	Dependence; dogmatism; causes; excuses.
2	Descriptive	Truth; precision; synthesis; impartiality; completeness.	Falsehood; error; bias; prejudice; ambiguity; partiality; omission.
1	Expressive	Sincerity; clarity; revealing expressions.	Lies; obscurity; concealing expressions.

people (playing different roles when members of different groups) illustrates the ubiquitous presence of noble language. DeRue and Ashford (2010: 643) offered a compatible view when they argued that leaders and followers mutually create their identities in contexts where they rotate their roles.

Two contrasting situations illustrate the difference between noble and base language in interpersonal power. These examples have been selected because they are from different social and historical contexts and thus establish the generic relevance of this article's thesis. They do not constitute a representative sample of leadership conversations. Rather, their purpose is merely to reveal how the concepts analysed in the previous sections manifest in antithetical forms.

Elizabeth Holmes' rise and fall

In 2003, aged only 19, Elizabeth Holmes claimed to have devised a revolutionary technology capable of performing crucial tests on trace quantities of blood. She founded Theranos as a private corporation to commercialise her innovation. Within a few years, venture capitalists and other private investors sunk over US$700 million into the initiative. At its peak in 2014, the company employed about 800 employees and its valuation was estimated to be about $9 billion, making its founder the youngest ever billionaire in history (Johnson, 2015). During this period, Holmes received widespread acclaim and was regularly invited to speak at public or broadcasted events. One of these was an interview she gave to journalist and talk show host Charlie Rose, which aired on 3 June 2015. Relevant excerpts read thus (Charlie Rose, 2015):

> Rose: Has anybody challenged the science of what you do, are there people who raise questions and say, you know, why doesn't she show us all this, because we feel more comfortable with the results?Holmes: The major lab companies, yes. [...] Our position on that is first of all we don't think that we need to explain ourselves to competitive companies.Rose: But you have it protected by patent and all of that.Holmes: We do. [...].Rose: On the other hand, there's a necessity to make sure that people understand that what you have done is truly revolutionary. [...] You went to the FDA.Holmes: We did. [...] And we think that the first place for that is the FDA. Because the FDA will take, you know, sometimes years to thoroughly review a system, a platform, the test data. You have to go do prospective studies. You have to enrol all these people. You have the chance to work with them constantly on making sure the data is right. And there is no higher bar than that, no matter how many publications you do, no one is going to look at it as thoroughly as they do. [...] They look at the integrity of the test in terms of its analytical performance. And they look at secondly its clinical use so they tell you the test performs this way in terms of its accuracy and precision. And then they say it should be used this way. [...].Rose: And how long will [the FDA's process] take? Holmes: We've been working on it. I'm the last person who should be predicting when the FDA clearance will come.

At the beginning of the excerpt, Rose reminds Holmes that some were challenging the validity of her technology (academics, for example, had started voicing doubt from February 2015). Holmes does not

respond directly to Rose's questions on these matters. Rather, she pivots and begins talking about two government bodies (the US Patent & Trademark Office and the Food & Drug Administration, on the credibility of which she insists), to establish the trustworthiness of her claims. She uses the same approach to avoid committing to a date at which official approval of her company's technology will be announced. Rose does not press Holmes on these points; in fact, it is Rose who mentions regulatory agencies first, thus providing Holmes with a convenient way of escaping his questions. At other times in the interview, Rose himself answers the questions he has just asked, as if he already knew Holmes' answers. In other words, Rose gives the impression of being convinced of the efficacy of Theranos' purported revolutionary technology and does not critically evaluate his guest's claims. As such, the conversation is not one of reasoned elaboration but serves only to establish Holmes' authority; her language appears noble (and Rose seems to perceive it as such) but is in fact base. It is, however, effective: Rose's deferential, obsequious tone throughout the interview makes it plain that the person really leading the exchange is not Rose, but Holmes.

After October 2015, Theranos came under intense critical scrutiny. That month, *The Wall Street Journal* published an article claiming that the company was relying on traditional blood testing technology instead of its own, which was unreliable. In April 2016, the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and Federal prosecutors began criminal investigations against Theranos. They alleged that the company deceived investors and officials about its technology and revenues (one of the charges is that Holmes reported an income of $100 million in 2014, whereas the actual figure was about $100,000), thus engaging in an elaborate and years-long fraud (Johnson, 2018). As part of these investigations, Holmes was interrogated by SEC representatives in August 2017. During her deposition, she was asked whether she knew that results of the tests Theranos conducted with its technology were inaccurate. Holmes answered thus (ABC Audio, 2020: 19′27″, reproduced verbatim):

> Holmes: My understanding generally is that anyone who is reviewing the data had a concern about the data don't include it in the report.SEC representative: But if some of the results came back incorrect, how do you know that the results that you did report were correct?Holmes: I ... I don't know. I did not oversee the labs. I trusted my team to make those decisions.

As in the Rose interview, Holmes tried to evade responsibility by deflecting questions to other individuals and denying knowledge of indicting facts (in her deposition to the SEC, Holmes is reported as saying 'I don't know' 661 times). Unlike Rose, however, the SEC representatives were not ready to accept Holmes' claims at face value, repeatedly confronting her denials with her own previous public statements. It is thus unsurprising that Holmes did not succeed in establishing authority with the SEC, eventually settling with the Commission and accepting to pay a fine of $500,000, forfeiting 19 million shares of her company stock and being barred from holding directorships of public companies for ten years (Robinson, 2018). Her company, Theranos, ceased operations on 4 September 2018. In separate proceedings, at about the same time, Holmes was indicted for defrauding patients, doctors and investors. Her trial is set to start in the second half of 2020. She faces up to 20 years incarceration if found guilty.

Mohandas Gandhi's 1922 trial

During his campaign for India's independence, Mohandas Gandhi was arrested and trialled on multiple occasions. One such instance was his 18 March 1922 trial for sedition after violent riots had followed the publication of three articles he authored, even though the texts contained impassioned calls for nonviolent forms of non-cooperation with the British rulers. Gandhi pleaded guilty to all charges levelled against him. During his trial, he declared (quoted in Tendulkar, 1951: 133–138):

> I have no desire whatsoever to conceal from this court the fact that to preach disaffection towards the existing system of Government has become almost a passion with me [...]. It is a painful duty with me but I have to discharge that duty knowing the responsibility that rests upon my shoulders [...]. It is impossible for me to dissociate myself from the diabolical crimes of Chauri Chaura or the mad outrages of Bombay. [...] As a man of responsibility, a man having received a fair share of education, [...] I should have known the consequences of every one of my acts. I know them. I knew that I was playing with fire. I ran the risk and if I was set free I would still do the same. [...] I believe that I have rendered a service to India and England by showing in non-co-operation the way out of the unnatural state in which both are living. In my opinion, non-co-operation with evil is as much a duty as is co-operation with good. [...] Non-violence implies voluntary submission to the penalty for non-co-operation with evil. I am here, therefore, to invite and submit cheerfully to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is deliberate crime, [...] The only course open to you, the Judge and the assessors, is either to resign your posts and thus dissociate yourselves from evil, if you feel that the law you are called upon to administer is an evil, and that in reality I am innocent, or to inflict on me the severest penalty, if you believe that the system and the law you are assisting to administer are good for the people of this country, and that my activity is, therefore, injurious to the common weal.

In delivering his verdict (condemning Gandhi to six years of imprisonment) a few hours later, the judge responded thus (quoted in Tendulkar, 1951: 138–139):

> Mr. Gandhi, [...] it is my duty to judge you as a man subject to the law, who by his own admission has broken the law and committed what to an ordinary man must appear to be grave offence against the state. I do not forget that you have constantly preached against violence. [...] There are probably few people in India who do not sincerely regret that you should have made it impossible for any government to leave you at liberty. [...] if the course of events in India should make it possible for the Government to reduce the period and release you, no one will be better pleased than I.

In their exchange, both Gandhi and his judge treat each other as intellectual equals. Each states the facts plainly, makes clear his values, justifies his actions by invoking such values explicitly, provides cogent arguments and formulates recommendations as well as intentions. Significantly, both the accused and the judge emphasise the importance of carrying out what they believe to be their duty. In so doing, they accept the responsibilities that accrue from their choices and remind the other party of their responsibilities, as each sees them. No threat is involved at any stage of the process. Gandhi notably acknowledges that he cannot dissociate himself from the crimes committed by those who claim to be his disciples (even though he insistently asked them to refrain from such criminality) and the judge accepts that it is himself (the judge), not the State that he represents, who sentences Gandhi. Both parties in the exchange are exemplary noble speakers.

Despite the striking imbalance in social positions between judge and defendant, the excerpt reveals that although Gandhi authorises the judge to pass legal adjudication upon him, on the moral front, Gandhi emerges as leader and the judge as follower. Gandhi argues – and in his response the judge concedes – that although a guilty verdict is legally correct, it is morally wrong. Moreover, judge and accused cooperate because each party grants authority to the other in his respective area of expertise. If they had not cooperated, the exchange would have resulted in defiance, contempt, threats and almost certainly coercion.

From a language use perspective, the exchange Gandhi had with his judge and the conversations Holmes had with Rose and the SEC representatives have consequential differences. Specifically, Gandhi and his judge were both noble speakers promoting responsibility and seeking cooperation through argument, whereas Holmes offered statements invoking predominantly base language. Indeed, Homes spoke mainly in terms of misrepresentations, imprecisions and allusions. In an overall sense, her rhetoric is well characterised as expressing non-responsibility.

Gandhi's and Holmes' conversations reveal another generic difference between noble and base language, namely the contrasting long term legacies of each form. Whereas Gandhi's noble language has secured his commanding historical stature as an archetypal leader, Holmes' leadership credentials are now tarnished. That is, if her duplicity was effective (convinced her listeners) for a period, it subsequently became grounds for criminal indictment. In other words, if base language achieves authority and thus leadership, it does so only for a restricted period. This limitation also applies to charisma. Indeed, for all the suasory force of their value-signalling, as Antonakis et al. (2016, 305) note, "leaders cannot say one thing and do another, or signal unrealizable actions, because in the long run they risk losing their credibility and hence the charismatic effect."

Implications for leadership research and education

Fifty years ago, Fiedler (1971: 1) observed that "there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are leadership theories – and there are almost as many theories of leadership as there are psychologists working in the field." It is unclear if substantial progress has been accomplished since. Indeed, leadership research remains plagued with conceptual and methodological heterogeneity. Among current problems in the domain, Antonakis et al. (2016) enumerated particularly thorny ones. These include unclear or tautological definitions of basic constructs, reliance on correlated or moderating variables as proxies for more focal ones and (insofar as data generation is concerned) widespread use of surveys which have been revealed to be beset by systematic error in both their development and application. One consequence of this malaise is underwhelming overall insight into the phenomenon of leadership based on empirical research and an associated paucity of compelling and convincingly tested hypotheses (exceptions exist, such as Meslec, Curseu & Fodor (2020) and Flynn and Staw (2004)). From a practical standpoint, such lack of clarity concerning causal processes has made it difficult to know how to go about leadership development (although, again, exceptions exist, e.g. Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002).

The conceptual distinctions presented and defended in this article give rise to genuinely new research and pedagogical agendas focusing on the praxeology of leaders and followers in their capacity as speakers. Moreover, a focus on language provides exogenous and verifiable data, independent of whether leadership obtains (thus avoiding confirmation bias caused by an initial artificial sampling restriction). Indeed, as this article shows, by studying the language of speakers and listeners in its context, it is possible to assess the degree to which each party proposes and responds to accurate or biased descriptions, valid or invalid arguments and justified or unjustified advice. Insofar as advice giving is concerned, analysis of language use enables conclusions about whether a counsel supports authority, promotes personal responsibility and

ultimately establishes voluntary obedience. By contrast, analyses of speakers' emotions, intentions or abstract conceptions of communication styles inevitably require that researchers interpret data that are implicit or the presence of which they must infer. Specifically, when these kinds of indirectly indexed elements are established as focal constructs, two levels of interpretation are required: determining whether data are present and decoding their meaning.

Studies focusing on whether the language used by leaders and followers is noble or base can be conducted using case study methodology, including historical content. Pseudo-laboratory studies (i.e., field or natural experiments) are also possible, for instance by asking subjects to assess the degree to which actors in leadership and followership roles enact voluntary or involuntary obedience. Hypotheses to be tested using such protocols would embrace inquiries into whether noble (or base) language use is associated with speakers' and listeners' other cognitive abilities and whether their words and phraseology moderate organisational performance. In a similar vein, the degree of alignment between language use forms of speakers and listeners from culturally dissimilar backgrounds, especially during the authority establishment phase of their relationship, will likely provide developmental insight into the phenomenon of leadership.

As noted, speech often has simultaneously noble and base elements, activated at various levels of the linguistic hierarchy. A 'noble language scale' assessing the deployment of these levels would yield data about the effectiveness of speakers and listeners seeking to generate and maintain a relationship based on authority. Such a scale would assess the extent to which descriptions can be received as true, arguments valid and recommendations authoritative as well as whether speakers promote and accept personal responsibility (for both themselves and their interlocutors). To be reliable, such assessment should not be made on short excerpts (as was done with this article's examples) but would require lengthier exchanges. Future inquiry into this topic could place emphasis on creating a rationale for a threshold proportion of descriptions, arguments, pieces of advice and promises required to establish a language as noble (or base).

This article has argued that a leader's authority is a mandate granted by followers to direct them, associated with the (perhaps implicit) promise that the leader's directions will have, ceteris paribus, a desired effect. When distinct from formal power relationships, leadership thus rests on mutual beliefs, perceptions and informal obligations between leaders and followers. Such a perspective implies that leadership entails what Rousseau (1989) identified as a psychological contract. Herein lies a new line of inquiry for scholars. Indeed, at the time of writing, Rousseau's conception of a psychological contract has not been well embraced by leadership researchers.

When leadership scholars turn their attention to impression management (the means by which individuals attempt to influence perceptions of people or events), they often unduly restrict the scope of their investigations. Specifically, they typically focus only on particular cases of leadership without a compelling rationale for making their selection. For instance, Sosik, Avolio, and Jung (2002) examined the contribution of impression management to the circumstance of charismatic leadership, Rozell and Gundersen (2003) investigated its role in small group leadership and Aggarwal and Krishnan (2013) studied its moderating effects in what they labelled transformational leadership. The thesis presented in this article widens the scope of such investigations insofar as it argues that the core functions of language establish authority and thus leadership generally, but does not elucidate how such functions assist in impression management. For example, in a generic sense, incomplete descriptions shape perception. Furthermore, once again in a general sense, biased advice influences social interaction.

Leadership training programmes arise from the framework proposed in this article. Such programmes would be relevant not only to aspiring leaders but also to those responding to communications from their would-be or nominally designated leaders. Indeed, the ability of people to speak and reply in terms that others find meaningful and propose reasonable elaborations varies. Further, such a capacity is not fixed for individuals; it can develop, but it can also wane. Based on the arguments presented, it is possible to assess whether individuals speak in noble or base language and thus whether they seek to establish authority or impose the power they possess. Together with critical thinking development programmes (e.g., Lovelace, Eggers, & Dyck, 2016) and persuasion resistance initiatives (e.g., Sagarin, Cialdini, Rice, & Serna, 2002), awareness raising of and training in application of noble language will enhance the sophistication of those grappling with leadership's practical aspects. Such training will also assist those at risk of falling prey to bullying and harassment under the guise of leadership. However, critical evaluation of communications is impaired by imprecise language, absence of moral referents and (relatedly) ignorance of the world's historical and intellectual foundations. In this regard, given the current attacks on liberal arts curricula within Western universities, it is relevant to point out that leadership and followership development programmes are incomplete without humanities courses generally and those addressing philosophy specifically (Joullié, 2016).

Conclusion

Machiavelli (1995) famously discussed how a prince obtains power through force, threat, manipulation or deception. As compelling as he is to read, he only told part of the story. Indeed, this article has laid out a case concerning how interpersonal power is secured without resorting to Machiavelli's means. In a nutshell, the case is this: to the extent that leadership entails voluntary obedience, a leader's power is authorised by those to whom it applies. As such, any relationship that involves involuntary obedience is not one of leadership.

According to Friedrich (1963, 1972), authority is capacity for reasonable elaboration, a quality of a communication by virtue of which such communication is acceptable. In this sense, a leader's power is conditional on and limited by the concession of authority granted by followers. Hence, leadership is best understood as not flowing from particular individuals, but rather as a relationship grounded in authority. According to Spillane (1987), authority is conveyed in advisory language, a function that entails, in one form or another, reasoning, description and expression. Whereas no prescription guarantees a language's effectiveness, Weaver (1970, 1985) made a compelling case that there are ways to delineate base from noble language. Specifically, the former involves insincerity, jargon, intimidation, deception and non-responsibility, the latter sincerity, true descriptions, sound reasoning and responsibility. Given that authority as a source of power is conveyed in noble language, base speakers aspiring to leadership are inclined to appear noble. However, authoritarian power figures are not authoritative. In fact, they do not possess authority, although some pretend that they do. That is, the 'authoritarian leader' (an oxymoronic yet popular character in literature) is not a leader, but someone who has obtained a position of institutionalised power. Base speakers – when they assume the role of a listener – uncritically accept the language of authoritarians and grant to them authority but noble speakers – when they assume the role of a listener – do so reluctantly, typically for lack of an alternative. However, as Weaver (1985) noted, although base language can be effective, especially when directed to listeners who are themselves base speakers, the difference between noble and base language does matter. Indeed, the alternative to leadership is not the absence of leadership. Rather, it is authoritarianism.

In workplaces and elsewhere, those in positions of power typically derive much of their self-image from being viewed as capable human beings as opposed to mere incumbents. Accordingly, they are inclined to believe that they are being obeyed because they are leaders and not by virtue of their mundane capacity to enforce obedience. If having the power to enforce obedience were enough to be a leader, authoritarian managers could claim the status. Similarly, if a leader, as the Latin etymology of the term implies, was anyone "who takes [people] on a journey" (Adler & Gundersen, 2007: 158), then bus drivers would so

qualify. Conceiving of leadership as a relationship grounded in authority culminating in responsibility and mediated through noble language, re-establishes the difference between leaders and authoritarian managers (and bus drivers).

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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2.11 : The language of executive coaching: A developmental framework

THE LANGUAGE OF EXECUTIVE COACHING: A DEVELOPMENTAL FRAMEWORK

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THE LANGUAGE OF EXECUTIVE COACHING: A DEVELOPMENTAL FRAMEWORK

Abstract

Although the practice of executive coaching has received sustained attention in literature, no theoretical framework exists to guide the language of conversations which aims to improve executive performance. This article addresses this omission. Following Richard Weaver, it resurrects an ancient distinction between noble and base language and combines this distinction with a linguistic hierarchy. Noble language culminates in and gives voice to optimal executive performance; as such it is the ideal language of executive coaching. Contributions to theory and research, practical and educational implications, and a call to action are outlined.

Although no consensual definition exists, coaching within an organisational context typically refers to a structured, short to medium-term relationship between two individuals aiming at the professional development of one of them, as indexed by improvement in work performance (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; De Haan, Bertie, Day & Sills, 2010; De Haan, 2008; Stern, 2008; Kilburg, 2008; Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Taking place between peers, supervisor and subordinate (sometimes as part of performance appraisal) or an executive and a consultant, coaching has become over recent decades a mainstream alternative to management development programmes based on formal or traditional-style education (Parker, Hall & Kram, 2008). In the twenty-first century, in its various forms, coaching has come of age as a serious and extensively resourced facet of organisational life. As such, it is embraced by tens of thousands of professionals throughout the world (ICF, 2012; Amstrong, 2011: 183).

The development of executive coaching as an organisational activity and industry has been accompanied by a growth of literature on the subject. However, until the mid-2000s, this

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corpus, because it had its origins in management consultancy, training and development, was mostly practitioner-orientated. For example, there are handbooks that delineate the respective roles of coach and coached (Kilburg & Dietrich, 2008; Downey, 1999), outline techniques to manage their relationship (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005; Stober & Grant, 2006) and offer action guides to maximise learning (De Haan & Burger, 2005). Manuals which describe methods to approach, structure and intervention in coaching conversations have also been authored, mostly by management consultants (Palmer & Whybrow, 2007; De Haan & Burger, 2005; Kilburg, 2000; Clutterbuck, 1985).

Research-based contributions to coaching have multiplied over the last fifteen years (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). During this period, scholars have sought to establish the benefits of coaching (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Parker, Hall & Kram, 2008; Boyatzis, Smith & Blaize, 2006), investigated feedback mechanisms and application protocols (Hooijberg & Lane, 2009; Mirvis, 2008) and delineated elements of successful executive coaching initiatives (De Haan, Bertie, Day & Sills, 2010). Other researchers have mapped out the structure and likely future of the 'coaching industry,' as well as its relationship with psychological professional associations (Segers, Vloeberghs, Henderickx & Inceoglu, 2011; Palmer & Whybrow, 2005).

Conjecture about coaching has often been grounded in psychological theory, specifically theory addressing psychotherapeutic intervention. For instance, drawing on parallels between coaching and the broader notion of counselling (McKenna & Davis, 2009; Hart, Blattner & Leipsic, 2001), authors have produced and defended models and techniques based on clinical intercession (Passmore, Peterson & Freire, 2016; Palmer & Whybrow, 2007; Peltier, 2001). Theoretical analyses of developmental practices focusing on the betterment of individual employees, such as mentoring and career counselling, are also available (Passmore, 2007; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Bachkirova & Cox, 2004; Kram, 1985). Despite such research

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effort, the psychosocial processes which mediate employee development remain unexplained (Manuti *et al.* 2015; Levy & Williams, 2004; Jacobs & Washington, 2003).

Executive coaching, as a distinct sub-discipline of general coaching, has been neglected by scholars, at least in relative terms. Specifically, while there is a degree of consensus that executive coaching is beneficial, authors such as De Haan and Duckworth (2013: 12) have observed that there is little agreement about what exactly its advantages are and how these should be assessed. Athanasopoulou and Dopson (2018: 70) summarised the situation. They note, in their meta-analysis of 110 executive coaching studies, that researchers have mostly concluded that such specialised sessions are often effective but did not discuss how and why this is so. It is noteworthy that the relative neglect of executive coaching has been a concern for several decades. Indeed, Feldman & Lankau's (2005: 845) view that theoretical contributions have not kept pace with advances in the practitioner literature was mere context for their more pointed comment that theorists have been unable to open the "black box" of executive coaching.

The relative dearth of theoretical contributions concerning the process of executive coaching is only one element of a wider and related body of scholarly oversight, that which concerns whether and how managers learn outside the classroom. Such neglect has been influenced by two intertwined conceptions. First, the existence of management education rests on the assumption that there exists a body of knowledge without which the practice of management is impaired (Joullié & Gould, in-press; Joullié, 2016: 176). Second, the existence of tertiary-level management qualifications, on the basis of which graduates are hired for junior managerial roles, presupposes that acquisition of such a corpus occurs at university and not elsewhere. This latter contention implies that independent executive coaches are somewhat illegitimate competitors to university-based management educators. It also diminishes the importance of managerial lifelong learning and (to the extent that it acknowledges its existence)

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does not distinguish it from formal (i.e. university-based) executive education. That such relegation has taken place is evidenced by the scarcity of contributions in *AMLE* and comparable elite journals exploring, in a focused way, continuous managerial learning and development beyond those investigating the aims, content and design of formalised executive education programs (Büchel & Antunes, 2007). By contrast, lifelong learning and education, as more general objects of analytic interest, have long received scholarly attention, be it in the form of dedicated journals (the *International Journal of Lifelong Education*) or standalone contributions (Tuijnman & Boström, 2002).

The purpose of this article is to peer into the 'black box' of executive coaching and, in so doing, to resurrect scholarly interest in the process by which managers learn and develop outside the classroom (but with the support and guidance of a coach). The starting point for this endeavour is the executive coaching conversation. Indeed, this exchange forms a crucial element of the coaching relationship because words and phraseology form the medium that delivers – or does not – the intended development that is the *raison d'être* of that relationship. This perspective, which de-emphasises notions of therapy or clinical intervention, is congruent with that of leading executive coaching scholars. For example, Stern (2008: 34ff) views executive coaching as a dual effort and privileged relationship aimed at developing, through exchanges and dialogues, executives as competent professionals while also helping them achieve business-related results. Similarly, Kilburg (2008: 25-28) argues that, when executives and their coaches meet, they talk about problems and conflicts within the entities employing the executives, possible solutions, as well as other measures meant to improve the executives' workplace performance (in this sentence, the operative words are 'talk about'). Stern's and Kilburg's orientations towards executive coaching provide context for and thus are compatible with the approach presented here. As a further point of context, it is noteworthy that coaching sessions and their outcomes can be documented in writing, but such documenting activity does

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not form the substance of what is occurring. Rather (and to repeat), it is by way of conversation that coaches facilitate executive performance improvement.

A concern for conversation as a developmental tool is not an entirely new area of scholarship. For instance, the effect of talking on workplace collaboration is focal in Hardy, Lawrence and Grant (2005) as well as Lawrence, Phillip and Hardy (1999). Furthermore, other researchers have examined the role of language as a means of effecting organised action (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Ford & Ford, 1995). However, there is a paucity in literature of more focused theory concerning the role conversations play in assisting executives grow professionally and, more specifically, improving the efficacy of executive coaching.

The theoretical contribution of this article takes the form of a linguistic framework. It is argued that the application of this framework enables executives and their coaches to identify behavioural deficiencies, evaluate remedial or developmental avenues and commit responsibly to enacting them. This framework rests on a distinction between noble and base language which is presented and defended in the following section. Examples of conversations found in literature illustrate how the framework applies in practice (these conversations are quoted in snippets in the text and are reproduced almost in full in an appendix). The article's later sections adumbrate research, practical and educational implications of the framework defended here, summarising such implications in the form of a call to action to relevant parties.

This article's framework, according to the view advanced by Bishop (2000), qualifies as a normative theory about how executive coaches should speak. Specifically, as per Bishop's conception, a normative theory has seven characteristics. Namely, it (1) recommends values and (2) identifies the grounds for accepting them. It specifies (3) decision-making protocols for those who accept the theory and determines (4) to whom the theory applies and (5) whose interests it considers. Finally, a normative theory outlines (6) the scope of its application and (7) the legal and regulatory structures that are required to support it. The framework presented

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in this article meets each of these criteria. Indeed, it is contextualised by the conversation between an executive and a coach where the goal is to improve the executive's professional performance (Bishop's criteria 4, 5 and 6). Such an effort is either mandated by an employer or independently sought (criterion 7). Insofar as criteria 1 to 3 are concerned, the following sections indicate why and how these are met.

Noble and base language

The idea that language has beneficial or detrimental but, in any case, powerful effects on those to whom it is directed is an ancient one. It was put forward by philosophers like Gorgias and Plato who insisted that when knowledge is dispensed orally, it is the responsibility of those who deliver it to ensure its beneficial effects on those who receive it (Crick 2014: 68; Plato 1970: 289). Aristotle (1997: 10) called *katharsis* language that clarifies the intellect and purges those who hear it of emotions which undermine human existence, such as fear and pity. Executive coaching, to the extent that it is an oral exercise, is subject to this principle. Indeed, the language it invokes must lead to productive consequences, that is, must contribute to performance improvement and more broadly to employee development.

Building on the distinction outlined by Plato and Aristotle, Weaver (1985: 3-26) delineated two types of language, noble and base. He argued that noble language encourages those to whom it is directed to speak clearly, think critically and make responsible choices. In the parlance of Plato and his disciples, noble speakers seek to strengthen the willpower of, and promote self-control in, their listeners. Achieving these objectives entails identifying and clarifying ambiguity, as well as replacing destructive beliefs with constructive and self-promoting ones. Overall, noble speakers empower their listeners by showing them better versions of themselves (Weaver, 1985: 25). An example of such parlance would be the coach who magnanimously acknowledges an insightful suggestion that is being discussed with an executive using a phrase such as 'this idea came from you, not from me.'

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In contrast to noble language, base language undermines personal courage and erodes liberty and dignity. Base speakers "work against the true understanding of [their] listeners [whom they seek to keep] in a state of pupillage [...] by never permitting an honest examination of alternatives" (Weaver, 1985: 11-12). They achieve this by exaggerating problems to elicit feelings of despair and by contextualising advice in a *milieu* of irrepressible, mostly hostile forces. Base speakers use words and phraseology that consolidate their control over those who listen to them. An example would be a manager who asserts to a colleague in need of guidance 'your boss can be a real jerk! I am glad I do not work for him. Do not listen to him. Here is what I would do…'

Weaver's preoccupation concerned the effect of language on human affairs and wellbeing. He conceived of such effects as substantive yet largely overlooked. His analysis addresses dialogue, persuasion and moral conduct. This broad emphasis did not allow him to formulate precise, unambiguous criteria with which to delineate noble from base language in specific situations. However, in the present context – that of executive coaching and in particular the pragmatic requirement for performance improvement – a more detailed exposition than Weaver offered is possible.

As the planners, persuaders and ultimately the tone-setters of organisations, executives have little choice but to be sensitive to and have mastery of language's effects on those to whom it is directed (a point not often made in management development literature). In this sense, they operate at their best when they take advantage of its full repertoire. The same is true for those who coach them, because simply to highlight people's performance shortcomings and insist that they improve (as base speakers often do when they seek to dominate their listeners) is to hinder professional development. Indeed, disproportionately emphasising performance deficits in feedback sessions undermines their worth because it breeds instinctive defensiveness and creates an unnecessarily adversarial dimension to a relationship (Crawshaw, 2010).

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Furthermore, appraising and passing judgement on someone's performance assumes that the appraiser is technically or psychologically superior to the appraised. Such circumstances of psychological inferiority are exacerbated when recommendations (or directions) that are intended to improve performance follow an instance of appraisal: when improvement recommendations are made, those to whom they are directed are implicitly deemed incapable of identifying and proposing solutions of their own. Should psychological dependence and inferiority become internalised by the concerned executive, performance deficiencies will likely continue or worsen. Conversely, executive effectiveness requires a degree of independence of judgement and a measure of autonomy in decision-making; these constructs are precisely what noble language seeks to promote.

In summary, if one accepts that executive performance requires high-level judgement and responsible autonomy in decision-making (Long, 2013; Church, 1997), noble language can be redefined as a parlance that inculcates and reinforces development in these areas and base language as one that does not. This delineation is compatible with Weaver's characterisation of noble language as that which provides those to whom it is directed with better versions of themselves: namely, in the present case, versions in which executives appear as responsible, competent, independent and autonomous decision-makers. It is worth reiterating here that language plays a central role in the discharge of executive duties. Specifically, compared with other kinds of organisational actors, which have procedural-related tasks and responsibilities, the executive function is essentially declarative. It cannot be adequately fulfilled without language sophistication. In this sense, the executive coaching relationship is an ideal facet of organisational life for road-testing the framework to be presented.

How to outline better versions of executives, that is, how to learn and practise noble language (and to recognise and avoid base language) in the context of an executive coaching

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conversation, are matters to which the remainder of this article is dedicated. A short venture into linguistics is necessary before these issues can be addressed.

Language functions and values

Language comprises functions, which linguists have attempted to delineate. For instance, Bühler (2011 [1934]) proposed three functions: the expressive, which consists of an outward display of an inner state; the signalling, which aims to elicit a reaction from others, and the descriptive, which conveys detail about the way things are perceived. Bühler further argued that these three functions exist in a hierarchy because signalling entails expression and describing entails both expression and signalling. Furthermore, each function takes one of two possible antithetical values. Specifically, (self-)expression is either revealing or concealing, signalling effective or ineffective, and description true or false.

Popper (1996: 295) augmented Bühler's hierarchy through proposing the argumentative function of language. For Popper, an argument serves as an expression, in that it is a sign of a person's internal state. It is also a signal insofar as it provokes a response from those who consider it. When it is about something or someone, an argument is descriptive. Finally, there is the argumentative function proper, the giving of reasons for holding a particular view.

In proposing a third iteration of Bühler's conception, Spillane (1987) added two functions to Popper's conceptualisation: the advisory and promissory. In this reformulation, recommendations require reasons and hence advising entails argumentation. Furthermore, statements of the type 'you should' (advice) presuppose 'you can' (description), establishing description as subordinate to advising. Finally, intentions or promises rest on recommendations ('I will' implies 'I should'). Table 1 summarises the complete proposed hierarchy and provides detail about its levels, their content and possible values (for the sake of simplification, the signalling function has been merged with the descriptive function).

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As with Bühler's and Popper's, in this article's hierarchy, language functions are rank-ordered according to the principle of logical entailment. In the current context, this axiom states that speakers cannot operate at a given level of the linguistic hierarchy without simultaneously activating (if implicitly) subordinate levels. Furthermore, in a two-party oral exchange, each protagonist manifests an orientation with respect to the two values these functions take, that is, instantiates the language functions in one or the other of their binary forms. These orientations do not necessarily align. For example, a coach may say 'You missed our meeting yesterday' (true descriptive statement), to which the coached may disingenuously respond 'Yes, but I didn't know we had one' (false descriptive statement).

(insert Table 1 about here)

As was done for the discussion on noble versus base language, the exemplars provided in the following paragraphs, which sequentially discuss elements of the language function hierarchy, are extracted (or slightly adapted from) two contrasting conversations found in McNamara (2011) and reproduced in an appendix.

Expressing – the language of feelings

The expressive function of language is placed at the lowest level of the hierarchy in Table 1 because it is the most primitive form of language. Expressive language is also the least regulated by linguistic conventions since shouts (e.g., 'ouch!') are exemplars. Expressive statements voice inner states such as feelings. They are either revealing (sincere) or concealing (insincere), but this status cannot be ascertained by external observers. Indeed, only the individual who utters an expressive statement ('talking to him makes me feel worse') knows if it corresponds to his inner state.

In an era that emphasises the importance of soft skills in managerial performance and general employability (Ritter, Small, Mortimer & Doll, 2018; Heckman & Kautz, 2012;

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Semadar, Robins & Ferris, 2006), the expressive function of language has become a focus for those concerned about employee and organisational development. For example, Frederickson (2003) and Lindebaum and Jordan (2012) hold that the display of emotion and giving voice to feelings enhance other facets of communication. In the same vein, the 'critical moments' of coaching identified in De Haan, Bertie, Day & Sills (2010) typically include an expressive component. Despite such purported benefits, coaches who overemphasise expression, for instance by encouraging those they coach to talk about their feelings, commit themselves to working with statements the truth status of which they cannot ascertain and with which they cannot argue. As such, by seeing language primarily as a vehicle for expressing feelings, these coaches diminish the roles of its higher functions. In so doing, they de-emphasise that, through language, individuals utter true and false descriptive statements, provide good or poor reasons for a proposed action, and make responsible or irresponsible promises. Catharsis, in modern parlance the release of pent-up emotion, is not the same as Aristotle's *katharsis* (the reorganising of beliefs by persuasion and argument).

Describing – the language of truth

The descriptive function of language is concerned with conveying representational accounts of the world. Observational statements (e.g., 'we have worked together for years') are either true or false, depending on whether other observers report compatible descriptions. Further, descriptive statements, by virtue of being about representation, convey data. Their objective is often to elicit action from those to whom they are directed. However, descriptions can fail to convey meaning and trigger responses (i.e., be ineffective signals) even when they are true. Indeed, they can be incomplete, imprecise, or offered in terms that are not suggestive enough for their audience to evaluate their content and relevance (e.g.: 'I have a time management problem'). Put in terms of information processing theory, data (words sequenced according to syntactic and grammatical conventions) do not inevitably convert to information, nor

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information to knowledge, even though such conversions are typically intended (Lachman, Lachman & Butterfield, 2015).

Truthfulness and effectiveness of descriptions are crucial dimensions of executive coaching. Communications about performance deficiencies are often not accepted and acted upon if offered in incomplete or inaccurate terms. When such circumstances exist, missives may even be interpreted as attempts to manipulate. When communications are conveyed unclearly (and the reality of what they were meant to highlight is subsequently recognised by the party being coached), such dysfunction is liable to being re-interpreted *post-hoc* as coaching incompetence. Coaches responsible for such a parlance inevitably struggle to maintain credibility.

Arguing – the language of autonomy

The argumentative function of language concerns the articulation of reasons to justify conclusions. In the hierarchy, it comes after the descriptive function because it is possible to argue about descriptions but not about feelings. As noted, an argument serves as an expression as it indexes an internal state. Insofar as it is about something or someone, an argument is descriptive. It also acts as a signal since it typically elicits an interlocutor's response. Moreover, arguments require, or at least imply, description. Finally, there is the argumentative function proper, the giving of reasons for holding a particular view: 'My boss owes me some advice – that is his job.'

Arguing is the language of autonomy because arguments enable people to evaluate communications and decide whether utterances can be trusted (Cattani, 2008). Valid critical arguments clarify problems, debunk fallacies, challenge experts and expose untruths. Critical thinkers unmask autocrats and those who seek to make issues appear unduly difficult or obfuscate to mislead and control. As such, arguing disabuses one of misconceptions and protects against manipulation. It is through argument (debate about conclusions through critical

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evaluation of their assumptions, premises and supporting reasoning) that options for action are expanded and elaborated.

Executives benefit from developing arguing skill. Whereas descriptive language is often complicated by metaphors and other ambiguities, argument is the vehicle for reasoned elaboration and therefore the basis of managerial authority (Spillane & Joullié, 2015). Being a strong arguer enables one to convince others of the merit of a course of action or the reality of a situation without having recourse to obfuscation, manipulation or coercion. Moreover, those skilled in arguing see through attempts on the part of external consultants, peers or subordinates to act in these ways. More generally, consultants, executives and subordinates find, in presenting and evaluating arguments, an implicitly agreed-upon intellectual scaffolding to conceive of and appraise new ideas and solutions. Executives seeking to lift their game should welcome argumentative peers and subordinates because intellectual confrontation forces a speaker to defend and (in so doing) sharpens views and ultimately improves decision-making.

Advising – the language of authority

In the linguistic hierarchy, advising sits above arguing because justifications need to be provided for recommendations to be accepted. Although justifications can take the form of appeals to reputed specialists (for example, in the context of a medical consultation), in most cases arguments are required to support recommendations. Indeed, even recognised experts typically offer a threshold degree of rationale and argument to buttress their views and increase the likelihood that their advice is understood, accepted and willingly embraced. If asked and conditions permitting, they state and elaborate reasons justifying their advice. According to Friedrich (1963: 269), the directive or instructional component of a communication is authoritative when it is accompanied by 'reasoned elaboration.' When reasoned elaboration is absent, that is, when advice is forced onto the listener without dialogue (e.g. 'go hire another employee – just do it!'), 'recommendations' default to being orders. In such cases, the

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conversation ceases to be authoritative and does not promote cooperation. Rather, it is better characterised as an exchange in which one party seeks authoritarian control.

When executive coaching is conducted as part of performance appraisal, advising is beset by two distinct difficulties, each of which, for reasons to be explained, have special import in the executive coaching context. The first stems from the power imbalance that exists between appraiser and appraised. Such an asymmetry undermines offers to cooperate because it makes authoritative advice sound like authoritarian direction. Additionally, advising rests on the implicit acceptance of an ethical perspective by those being advised. An example of an ethical message embedded in a seemingly neutral advice would be: 'hire someone else who will work harder for you; we need to get rid of dead wood here' (implying that employees who do not appear to work sufficiently hard are without value and should be dismissed). Executives as coaches can thus be tempted to coerce or manipulate their subordinates into adopting moral values via a language of authority (Maclagan, 2007). Even when this is not their intention, the fact remains that the language of advice is based on 'should', 'ought to' and expressions of comparable meaning. As such, it can be confused with (or used as a substitute for) a language of power, especially when one party in the conversation is subordinate to the other.

The second difficulty that undermines advising is a general one, but of special relevance within the executive coaching context: people seeking or giving advice are not disinterested agents. Specifically, some advice-seekers desire to be relieved of their responsibilities. For example, a bank executive asking his coach for help when negotiating the terms of a complicated corporate loan is, in a sense, asking for the advice-giver to take over as negotiator. The intentions of advisers are equally ambiguous, for they can advance their personal interests under the guise of helping the advice-seeker. These suspicions are especially thorny when it comes to executive coaching, where, compared with other coaching scenarios, understanding who ultimately benefits from the process is often not straightforward. Such convolution and

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opaqueness have been explored under the auspices of misaligned interests of parties in the owner-manager and employment relationships and received analytic attention from both agency theorists and industrial sociologists (Kochan 1998 & 2007; Braverman 1998; Fox 1974). More specifically, when an executive coaches a peer from the same entity, there are typically conflicts arising from the hidden (and not so hidden) agendas occasioned by the competitive and typically hostile dynamics of internal labour markets.

Executives facing coaches who are pressing moral views or advancing their own agendas possess the tactical option of redirecting the conversation toward immediate, pragmatic concerns through descriptive language. Coaches confronted with executives asking insistently for advice (cf. Hooijberg & Lane, 2009) can default to descriptions of problems and their possible solutions and (in adopting such a mode) eventually require that those they advise choose for themselves possible remedies. An example of this kind of redirection is an executive who says 'What else am I going to do about this problem?', to which the coach replies 'Tell me more. How did you conclude you have this problem?' In either case, parties must remember that organisational success is assessed using practical criteria. In this sense, even when they are agents for the employer, coaches have aligned interests with those they advise.

Promising – the language of responsibility

The promissory language function is at the apex of Table 1's hierarchy because its activation incorporates simultaneous utilisation of each of the other subordinate levels (as per the aforementioned principle of logical entailment). A promise represents a commitment to engage (or not) in a course of action, based upon a recommendation that one has – at a minimum – made to oneself. Not all promises are equivalently credible. Indeed, those supported by true descriptions, sound arguments and authoritative recommendations are preferable to others because they are more likely to be carried out and to bring about expected consequences.

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Promising, autonomy and responsibility are overlapping constructs. Autonomy is fought and gained in the language of argument; responsibility, that is, the understanding, acceptance and respect of obligations, is expressed in the language of promises. If there is no responsibility without autonomy, responsibility has primacy over autonomy. Specifically, if people are to treat others as they want to be treated, they should grant others what they claim for themselves. As far as autonomy is concerned, application of the golden rule necessitates, as Szasz (2004: 17) put it, that individuals "restrain their inclinations to deprive others of the freedom they want for themselves: their primary duty is to govern themselves, not others." An example of an intention taking account of one's responsibility towards others is 'this conversation makes me realise that I have to do something. I will make time to talk to my subordinates. One of my problems was that I was hoping a solution would come along without making time for it.'

If personal responsibility and the ability to engage in critical debate are desirable attributes of seasoned executives, then those who aspire to such roles outline a better version of themselves through a language that stresses autonomy, authority, cooperation and truth, rather than irresponsibility, heteronomy, authoritarian control and untruth. In other words, if responsibility is the overarching characteristic of executive performance, then senior managers develop professionally and become better performers by speaking noble language. Table 1 can now be elaborated to show how noble and base language are expressed during a coaching session.

(insert Table 2 about here)

In the workplace, there are executives seeking to escape from autonomy to avoid or minimise their responsibilities (Christensen, Mackey & Whetten, 2014). Others habitually claim responsibility when they succeed and, in such circumstances, boast in a proud language of choices and reasons, but seek protection in non-responsibility when they fail, falling back on a language of irrepressible causes as excuses. To illustrate this point, consider a hypothetical

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sales executive pointing to his superior managerial skills when his staff meets its performance targets, but blaming the same underlings or the state of the economy when performance objectives are not met. During a coaching conversation, such an individual can be reminded that responsibility is a privilege conferred to adults and withheld from children. Those unconvinced by this reasoning can heed the counsel of Peter Drucker, who expressed essentially the same idea succinctly and with stark clarity: be responsible, or be fired.

> "*Responsibility – not satisfaction – is the only thing that will serve.* […] It does not matter whether the worker wants responsibility or not. The enterprise must demand it of him. The enterprise needs performance; and now that it can no longer use fear, it can get it only by encouraging, by inducting, if need be by pushing, the worker into assuming responsibility" (Drucker, 1989: 297-298; emphases in original).

Two contrasting conversations

Carter McNamara (Action Learning Source, n.d.), Principal Consultant and co-founder of Authenticity Consulting, LLC, claims three decades of successful executive coaching. In his professional blog, McNamara (2011) provides two contrasting examples of dialogue between a manager acting as coach for one of his peers. These conversations are reproduced in an appendix and analysed in this section.

For McMamara (2011), while the first conversation (that between Bob and Tom) is typical of what happens in workplaces, it does not result in performance improvement. In his view, only the second dialogue (that between Jack and Tom) exemplifies an effective coaching conversation. He identifies elements underlying such effectiveness, three of which are especially noteworthy. First, for McNamara, Tom and Jack are honest with each other. Second, the questions Jack asks Tom explore realistic possibilities. Third, the exchange results in Tom taking "ownership [of] his actions."

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The authors of this article concur with McNamara that the second exchange is more efficacious in assisting Tom to identify solutions (and as such is more organisationally beneficial) than the first. In the first conversation, Tom and Bob make no effort to characterise Tom's problems; indeed, these are not described, but merely alluded to. As a result, possible solutions remain elusive and therefore cannot be pursued. The discussion concludes with the protagonists appearing to sweep the concerns under the carpet, perhaps hoping that the obliquely referenced problems will sort themselves out. By contrast, the second conversation (that between Jack and Tom) embodies effective executive coaching. This is the case because, in that dialogue, each protagonist strives to describe situations accurately (i.e., they each minimise use of, and need for, inferences), argue soundly using facts (not preferences or value-based judgements) as premises and commit to reasonable action that is within their purview. Put in terms of the linguistic framework presented in the current article, Jack and Tom speak noble language.

Theoretical and research implications

Scholars writing about coaching have noted that research in this domain has typically disregarded how such exchanges are conducted (Segers, Vloeberghs, Henderickx & Inceoglu, 2011: 218). Others have argued that further exploration of the experience of coaching is required (De Haan, Bertie, Day & Sills, 2010: 619). More specifically and as noted in the Introduction, insofar as executive coaching is concerned, the process by which managers learn informally outside the classroom has been largely neglected. Hence, it is unsurprising that there is a paucity of literature which sheds light on the role that conversations play in executive coaching. The current article addresses this neglect through making four different kinds of contribution.

First, the conceptual distinctions presented and defended in this article give rise to a new research approach focusing on the praxeology of coaches and executives when such parties

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take part in a coaching conversation. Indeed, the article's framework can be implemented and evaluated using defensible methodologies. When language is established as the object of analysis, it provides explicit data that are, by definition, independently verifiable. For example, one can put in place robust indices that assess the degree to which each speaker proposes honest or biased descriptions, valid or invalid arguments, justified or unjustified advice and whether such advice promotes personal responsibility. By contrast, analyses of individuals' emotions, intentions or abstracted elements of communication style inevitably require that researchers interpret manifest data and in so doing leave themselves open to criticisms that variously fall under the heading of confirmation bias and other forms of subjective filtering. In even more methodologically problematic scenarios, the data themselves are not fully manifest, thus requiring two stages of interpretation entailing speculation about its presence and its meaning. Such is the case, for example, when a researcher establishes body language as an object of scholarly interest.

Second, the framework presented in this article describes and delimits the kind of language that coaches should use and encourage their executives to speak. For reasons presented, noble language facilitates recognition of shortcomings, exploration and justification of remedial action and commitment to behavioural change. Describing underperformance, identifying action plans and setting objectives do not deliver performance improvement in and of themselves because such endeavours, insofar as they are reflected upon using words and phraseology, mostly activate lower-level language functions of the linguistic hierarchy, notably description. For executive performance improvement to be possible, arguments, recommendations and responsible promises must also be offered, if only by the coached individuals to themselves. Such an undertaking transcends description and is played out within the realm of higher language functions.

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Third, the practice of noble language buttresses the professional and personal legitimacy of executives. Indeed, high-performing executives are individuals who: describe situations accurately and effectively; orientate their colleagues' attention towards pertinent matters; seek cooperation in solving problems and implementing solutions; look for remedial actions through arguments; offer relevant and authoritative recommendations; and accept the responsibly that flows therefrom (Long, 2013; Osborne & Cowen, 2002; Gehani, 2002). Put in this article's terms, high-performing executives speak noble language. Coaching provides them an ideal opportunity to learn and practise it.

Fourth, the practice of noble language within coaching sessions aligns personal and organisational interests. Such alignment is essential to the coaching process because (setting aside insights derived from agency theory) executive success exists in the context of organisational success (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018). Additionally, since noble language encourages honesty and cooperation, it is a practice that coaches can embrace and encourage while complying with, indeed exemplifying, professional best practices (Chung & Gfroerer, 2003: 147-148).

Aside from executive coaching, the linguistic guidelines offered in this article are relevant to other kinds of management communication. However, they require adjustments for specific cases. For instance, selection interviews, promotions and dismissals have different objectives, requiring disparate ways of speaking; nevertheless, each of these kinds of communication-related activities is enhanced when parties commit to truth telling, sound argument and personal responsibility. Beyond the arena of executive performance, exchanges between, for example, teachers and students, doctors and patients, lawyers and clients, to name a few examples, are also enhanced by the practice of noble language, especially when modelled and encouraged by the dominant party. Noble language is equally suited to integrative bargaining negotiations, since in such discussions the objective of both parties is to find solutions simultaneously and

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collaboratively to meet their objectives (Joullié & Spillane, 2021). Parties to industrial disputes similarly benefit from adopting noble language, since in the majority of such cases, as a matter of practical necessity, protagonists need to find agreement concerning focal issues. Such a contingency view offers a spectrum of research agendas for this article's framework.

Practical implications and a call to action

The linguistic framework presented in the preceding pages assumes that when coaches meet with those they coach, they can justify the substance of their conversation on practical grounds. In other words, it is presumed in this article that coaches (especially when they are also the supervisors of the individuals being coached) do not engage in duplicitous feedback manipulation or other abusive modes of conversation (see Duffy, Ganster & Pagon, 2002 or Tepper, 2000 for investigations in the consequences of such events). In fact, the approach described in this article reduces the likelihood and mitigates the consequences of such phenomena.

Rational individuals appreciate that, at least insofar as decision-making is concerned, truth is more efficacious than falsehood, arguing based on evidentiary premises and constrained by logic is superior to drawing conclusions without such discipline, and responsible action is preferable to its irresponsible counterpart. However, curiously, a mode of operating that habitually incorporates these elements has not become orthodoxy. Furthermore, collaborative effort is not guaranteed merely because a group of people share the same employer (Hardy, Lawrence & Grant, 2005). Indeed, in any workplace, there will be employees, including executives, ready to lie, misrepresent and engage in duplicitous behaviour to further their perceived personal interests.

At work generally and during a coaching session particularly, employees at each level of an organisational structure seek to clarify the standards by which they and their colleagues are to conduct themselves, the functions they are required to fulfil, and the goals they are expected to

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attain. Inevitably, however, executives face behaviour that deviates from what job descriptions prescribe or by-laws and other norms stipulate. Performance-seeking executives, when faced with supervisors, peers or subordinates inclined to shirk their duties, revert to a language of sincerity, truth, logic and personal responsibility: noble language.

Management education is regularly subject to disparate criticism. Notably, it has been attacked for having limited bearing on career success (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002), breeding know-it-all arrogance (Mintzberg, 2004) and promulgating theories that undermine management practice (Ghoshal, 2005). This article's linguistic framework represents a partial remedy to each of these malaises. It also offers a means of bringing discipline and rigour to a hitherto largely overlooked aspect of management development: the deployment of language for achieving organisational objectives. Indeed, the multi-element nature of this article's schema (replete with detail concerning language functions, their possible values and archetypal supporting examples) brings order to a domain of workplace existence which otherwise appears *ad-hoc* and unruly.

The framework defended in this article supports the developmental aspirations of myriad parties caught up in executive development. Although realisation of its benefits requires time, a working understanding of its core principles obtains quickly. In practice, executives as noble speakers welcome justified criticism, recognise their own shortcomings and embrace opportunities to improve and in so doing grow professionally. For their part, management educators do their job well when they emphasise noble language skill in their quest to produce responsible and performance-seeking acolytes. Outside the classroom, educators lift themselves into a higher league when they practise noble language in their deliberations with students and in talking about scholarly performance. Expressed differently, management educators convinced by the value of noble language demonstrate their commitment to its application in their work through their choice of words and phraseology. In the end, words and

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phraseology are (and can only be) the substance of the action taken by a management educator; for language is really the only weapon in their arsenal.

In the classroom, there exist engaging techniques for teaching noble language, such as role-plays, simulation games and other experiential methods. Case studies in which protagonists are placed in moral conundrums or in situations of conflict or disagreement also have versatility in that they provide bases for diverse practice scenarios for aspiring noble speakers. These kinds of approaches are typically well received by students, especially when compared with conventional (lecture format) classroom content delivery (Power & Gould, 2011). In the present case, non-orthodox teaching techniques are necessary in that facility with language is procedural in nature and improves with practice. The cultivation of noble language skill will also be facilitated through using techniques that develop resistance to attempts at manipulation, typical of base speakers (Sagarin, Cialdini, Rice & Serna, 2002).

Conclusion

To the extent that it is discharged principally through oral communication, the practice of management is essentially a linguistic exercise. This is particularly the case for executives, who have a special responsibility to develop facility with language, its functions, and its effects on those to whom it is directed. Indeed, as essentially planners and decision-makers, executives are not an organisation's doers; rather, they are the ones who talk and listen. Hence, they must be convincing speakers if they aspire to be effective executives.

Although noble language is relevant beyond the executive coaching relationship and thus in other contexts where conversations are used to persuade, it has special import for executive development. Beyond such specific utility, a commitment to noble language offers more universal advantages. Indeed, to the extent that thinking is talking to oneself, then the language individuals use in their internal dialogue shapes their stream of consciousness, their

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understanding of themselves and the world and ultimately their own behaviour and that of others. At work as in life generally, invoking base language in internal dialogue leads to misperceiving reality, which in turn leads to making suboptimal decisions. Such a course prevents individuals from making responsible promises to themselves and others, renders them vulnerable to manipulation and reinforces feelings of dependency. The remedy for this kind of self-inflicted misery is, as the Ancients knew, noble language.

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Tables

Level	Function	Content	Values	
5	Promissory	Commitments	Responsibility	Non-responsibility
4	Advisory	Recommendations	Cooperation	Control
3	Argumentative	Justifications	Autonomy	Heteronomy
2	Descriptive	Descriptions	Truth	Falsehood
1	Expressive	Inner states	Revealing	Concealing

Table 1: A hierarchy of language and values; adapted from Spillane (1987).

Implied function of language	Noble language (effective coaching) stresses...	Base language (ineffective coaching) encourages...
Promissory	Responsibility; courage.	Non-responsibility; cowardice.
Advisory	Authority; cooperation; understanding.	Power; control; conflict; coercion.
Argumentative	Autonomy; expertise; critique; choices; reasons.	Dependence; dogmatism; causes; excuses.
Descriptive	Truth; precision; synthesis; impartiality; completeness.	Falsehood; error; bias; prejudice; ambiguity; partiality; omission.
Expressive	Sincerity; clarity; revealing expressions.	Lies; obscurity; concealing expressions.

Table 2: Noble versus base language in the context of executive coaching.

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Appendix

First conversation (Bob is the coach and Tom is the peer)

Tom: Bob, can I talk to you for a couple of minutes? We've worked together for years. I have a time management problem. I just don't get enough done in a day. What do you think?

Bob: Yeah, me, too. That's hard for all of us. I know your boss. It's time someone made him take control. Make him fix your problem. What's with that guy anyway?

Tom: I've asked him for help, but he said everything on my todo list is important and that I need to get it all done. He makes me feel even worse. What do you do?

Bob: Wow, your boss can be a real jerk! I'm glad I don't work for him. Maybe you should take a time management course. That's an idea!

Tom: I'm already so busy. How am I going to find time to take a course?

Bob: I don't know. I'm just giving you some ideas. Maybe you need to work more hours.

Tom: I'm already working 50 hours a week. If I work any more, I'll just be taking time from my family. What do you do?

Bob: I don't know. We all have a time management problem. Maybe you just forget about it for a while.

Tom: I suppose I just live with it like everyone else.

Bob: You've got about 10-12 people working for you, right?

Tom: I've got 12.

Bob: Dump some of your work on your people. Maybe they need to work harder. This place never hires enough people.

Tom: They're already as busy as I am. I guess I just live with this.

Bob: How big is your budget – about one million?

Tom: Yeah, about one million?

Bob: Tell you what, go hire another employee – someone who'll work even harder for you, OK? We need to get rid of the dead wood around here. Just do it.

Tom: I suppose. Whatever.

Second conversation (Jack is the coach and Tom is the peer)

Tom: Jack, can I talk to you for a couple of minutes? We've worked together for years. I have a time management problem. I just don't get enough done in a day. What do you think?

Jack: Tell me more. How did you conclude that you have that problem?

Tom: I never get everything done on my todo list. The more I get done, the more I end up adding to the list. I talked to my boss and he just said, "You need to get it all done."

Jack: What would successful time management look like to you?

Tom: Well, I'd get everything done on my list.

Jack: How is that realistic?

Tom: It's not, but what else am I going to do?

Jack: How do you like to solve problems like this? For example, do you like to talk to someone, make a list of pro's and con's, or read books about the subject?

Tom: Well, I do like to talk to a few people and to make a list of pro's and con's.

Jack: Who are some people you could talk to for help?

Tom: Well, I really think my boss owes me some advice – after all, that's his job. Also, I have two co-workers who seem to feel good about how they manage time.

Jack: How would you approach them? Sounds like you already tried to talk to your boss, and that didn't work out so well.

Tom: I'll start first with my co-workers – and I'll ask them for advice about approaching our boss, too.

Jack: When will you realistically be able to talk to them? You seem so busy.

Tom: This is really important to me. I'll talk to my co-workers today to schedule time with them.

Jack: How will you fit them into your schedule, since you're so busy already?

Tom: Jack, this conversation is helping me to realize that I've got to do something. I'll make time to talk to them.

Jack: Sounds like you're getting more perspective on this time management problem?

Tom: Yeah, maybe one of my problems is that I'm hoping some kind of fix will come along without my having to make time for it.

Jack: That's a good insight, Tom.

Tom: Jack, this conversation was really helpful! You're really smart!

Jack: Tom, the answers seemed to come from you, not from me.

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Jack: What was helpful about this conversation?

Tom: I guess I really like the way that you just asked me good questions. It really made me

think – and I realized that I'm smarter than I thought!

Jack: I'm glad to hear that! Thanks for being so honest in this conversation.

(These conversations have been extracted from MacNamara, 2011).

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2.12 : The language of integrative collective bargaining

Original Article

ELRR

The language of integrative collective bargaining

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Abstract

Although collective bargaining is essentially a communication process, the role of language (as distinguished from discourse) in bargaining exchanges has received little attention from industrial relations scholars. Building on the work of Karl Popper, this article proposes a decomposition of language into functions and values and analyses their relevance when parties to a collective bargaining encounter engage in an integrative process. The proposed framework provides labour negotiators seeking integrative outcomes with linguistic guidelines and scholars with a tool to analyse bargaining exchanges.

JEL Code: J52

Introduction

Human affairs generally and employment relationships specifically occur in contexts of indeterminacy (Baldamus, 1961; Edwards, 1995; Smith, 2006). This is the case because no collective or individual agreement, no employment contract and no job description can determine precisely or conclusively how much effort is to be exerted in exchange for given wages or working conditions. Moreover, convincing evidence, compelling moral evaluations and logical demonstrations (i.e. propositions that have an overwhelming suasory power) are rarely available in workplace situations. When making claims, actors

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must therefore persuade their audience of the validity of their positions. In this sense, the employment relationship is essentially a linguistic arena (Hamilton, 2001).

Within industrial relations settings, persuasion is particularly salient during bargaining exchanges. As Martin (1992) noted, 'collective bargaining is a process of persuasion, [in which each party attempts] to persuade the other side to improve its offer or to reduce its demands' (p. 101). At some point in the process, one side delivers an assessment of the current state-of-affairs and advances propositions to amend it, supported by some form of reasoning calling on evidence, moral justification and application of the principles of logic. To this assessment and proposal, the other party responds and advances its own views. Arguments are thus weighed against each other and such exchanges normally resolve in agreements, formal or informal. These agreements are typically not definitive, though, for situations keep evolving and arrangements need to be revised at regular intervals by the parties to the employment relationship. In any case, the endeavour is less about closure (which remains temporary) than it is about opening, response and counter-proposal. Besides, unsuccessful arguments rarely disappear; they often return, in one shape or another, in future disputes (Kirkbride and Durcan, 1987: 7).

Several scholars accept the central role of language in industrial relations (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004; Boden, 1994; Drew and Sorjonen, 1997). In existing research, however, when not referring to tongues or the ability to speak them (Almond and Connolly, 2020; Manzella, 2015; Ubalde and Alarcón, 2020), language is generally understood in an Orwellian sense. Indeed, as Hamilton (2001: 433–435) observed, for most industrial relations authors, language is synonymous with attempts to frame the context of discussions, manipulate opinion and structure perception of reality. For instance, Eaton and Kriesky (2001) analysed how managements used allegedly neutral language to control union organising and card-check agreements. Similarly, Kirkbride (1986) studied how the general manager of a medium-sized company employed seemingly common language to control discussions with worker representatives. In other words, industrial relations scholars have generally understood language as discourse, that is, as the way cognition (beliefs, ideas, etc.) is communicated, taking account of the location of communication, who speaks, why and when (van Dijk, 1997: 2). In so doing, these researchers have neglected the use of language (words and phraseology, what they achieve and what they reveal of speakers) as an object of analytic interest.

The identification of language with discourse and its neglect as a distinct focal construct are particularly visible in studies of collective bargaining exchanges.[1] Indeed, in these investigations, researchers have typically examined the way protagonists frame proceedings, before they take place, or during them. For instance, Wodak and van Leeuwen (2002) investigated the speeches of Austrian Chancellor Viktor Klima when he exposed his youth unemployment policies. Cooper and Ellem (2008) analysed the communications of the Australian government when it launched its employment relationship reforms (which, among other outcomes, reshaped the collective bargaining process). In the same vein, Cutcher-Gershenfeld and Isaac (2018) investigated the way legislative texts have shaped labour relations. Furthermore, while researchers have proposed comparative discursive analyses of integrative and distributive negotiations (Donohue and Roberto, 1996; Lillie, 2004; Olekalns et al., 1996; Rodríguez et al., 2016), linguistic analyses of such processes are rare. A notable exception to this observation is the study

of Taylor and Thomas (2008), which found that successful negotiations (those resolving in settlements agreed by both parties) are associated with higher levels of linguistic style matching (word use coordination) by negotiators than unsuccessful negotiations.

Aristotle (1994) argued that suasory effectiveness has three intertwined elements: logic, pathos (what hearers expect) and ethos (speaker-based). He also insisted that persuasion demanded style, analogies and metaphors, which, on his view, are more persuasive than literal expressions – an insight which has found empirical support (Sopory and Dillard, 2002). Later authors have not deviated markedly from such recommendations, adjusting only their illustrious predecessor's analysis to modern circumstances. For instance, Atkinson's (1984: xvi) study of the ways in which politicians' speeches arouse audiences is, on the author's own admission, a simplification and adaptation of Greek (i.e. mostly Aristotelian) techniques. Similarly, Burke (1969) did not diverge from Aristotelian guidelines when he argued that hearers should identify with speakers if they want to persuade them. Despite their enduring merits and applicability, however, these suasory techniques do not include linguistic considerations. Specifically, they gloss over the fact that language can be decomposed into functions and what their use reveals of speakers' and listeners' intentions.

This article contributes to industrial relations scholarship by proposing a linguistic framework applicable to collective bargaining exchanges. Specifically, after a primer on integrative bargaining, the article presents a framework which decomposes language into functions and related values and analyses their contribution to the achievement of integrative outcomes. Such outcomes, it is argued, require that bargaining parties use effective signalling, true descriptions, valid arguments and authoritative advice about points at issue, rather than attempt to control their counterpart through authoritarian communications. In addition to its practical value for labour negotiators, this article's linguistic framework opens avenues for further research.

Integrative collective bargaining

As opposed to distributive negotiations which are constant-sum games, integrative exchanges are discussions in which parties seek to cooperate by reconciling their interests to some degree, thereby increasing the total value of the sharing upon which they settle (Barrmeyer, 2017). Operating under adversarial preconceptions, people often do not look for integrative outcomes during negotiations because they believe such arrangements do not exist (Basadur et al., 2008; Thompson and Hastie, 1990). On their view, the pool of value is fixed and therefore one party's gain is necessarily another party's loss. In such distributive scenarios, while persuasion and agreement are desirable, they are not required when one party has means to impose its will unilaterally. However, negotiations have rarely, if ever, strictly binary outcomes; rather, settlements typically include degrees of integration and distribution (Barrmeyer, 2017; Putnam and Wilson, 1989). That is, in most cases, parties can achieve a better outcome than if they had simply exchanged compromises.

Within industrial relations settings, employers and employees seldom value the same point at issue in the same way. Such differences in valuation create mutually beneficial opportunities and thus integrative bargaining outcomes. For instance, discussions about the introduction of teamwork to improve productivity are opportunities to reduce

workload or upskill employees. Even wage disputes can be turned into opportunities to reach agreement on flexitime or job security (Weiss and Schmidt, 2008). Alternatively, matters not initially included in the discussion can be brought into it to enlarge the field in which reciprocated concessions can be found. Discovering where such opportunities lie and how to obtain them is that with which integrative bargaining is concerned.

Integrative bargaining requires that parties communicate collaboratively. Indeed, the likelihood that parties discover, agree on and reciprocate beneficial opportunities increases when they reveal their interests, beliefs and values and seek options through information sharing (Barrmeyer, 2017). Furthermore, since integrative bargaining requires each party to balance its own interests with those of the other, integrative outcomes are typically discovered through proposals and counterproposals, argument and counterargument. Persistence is also required since exposing one's interests, understanding those of others and creating mutually acceptable solutions takes more time and effort than simply trading concessions without revealing their costs.

Industrial relations scholars have tended to consider labour negotiations as a fundamentally adversarial exercise (Provis, 2000). Indeed, although they have generally recognised cooperation as a desirable objective, most researchers have assumed a fundamentally conflictual perspective on the employment relationship (Bray et al., 2020). On this view, integrative outcomes appear unrealisable. In fact, if they are to be achieved, some authors (e.g. Friedman and Shapiro, 1995; Fulmer et al., 2009) recommend resorting to bluffing, concealment, distortion and deception in labour negotiations.

The use of deceptive tactics when seeking achieves integrative outcomes is vulnerable to two rejoinders. First, any settlement reached by way of manipulative techniques cannot be called integrative. Except in those rare cases where they benefit people against their will, agreements reached through deception are exploitive in nature, even if the deceived party does not immediately realise that this is so. As such, these outcomes forego the additional value that could have been generated by way of a genuinely integrative process (Townsend and Loudoun, 2016). Second, even in adversarial situations, ad hoc mutually beneficial agreements exist that improve on simple 'I win, you lose' outcomes. Indeed, irrespective of whether the work environment is 'high trust' or 'low trust' (Fox, 1974), parties to industrial disputes, as a matter of practical necessity, need to find at least temporary agreement on day-to-day basic issues. This conclusion holds whichever perspective on the employment relationship one adopts, be it radicalism, adversarial pluralism, collaborative pluralism, consultative unitarism, autocratic unitarism and egoism (Bray et al., 2020: 128).

More generally, when employers and employees enter collective bargaining negotiations, they discuss rules and policies through which organisational goals are to be met. Each side appoints representatives to participate in this process and make decisions on its behalf. Such a delegation of decision-making power reduces the individual freedom of the delegates, because employers and employees alike will remonstrate and ultimately remove their mandate if they come to believe that their representatives no longer act in what they perceive to be their best interests. Delegates on either side thus retain their mandate for as long as they can secure agreements deemed to be advantageous by those they represent. Integrative settlements belong to this category and strengthen the mandate of those who obtain them. The stability of the work organisation, as well as the

general impression among its members that it is in capable hands, is also enhanced thereby (Townsend and Loudoun, 2016). Such consequences explain, in part, why integrative bargaining outcomes are superior, in terms of staff morale and workplace performance, to distributive ones (Deery and Iverson, 2005). Why and how these improvements are achieved become clearer when analysing the functions of language and their related values.

Language functions and values

The main function of language – communication – can be decomposed into (sub)functions. Building on the work of German linguist Bühler (2011 [1934]), Popper (1989 [1963]: 134ff) analysed language into the following four functions: expressive, signalling, descriptive and argumentative. The expressive function serves to convey the inner states of the speaker, such as emotions and feelings. The signal function aims to elicit reactions from others (for instance, linguistic responses). The descriptive function involves statements about how a state-of-affairs is perceived by the speaker. Finally, the argumentative function concerns the presentation of reasons in connection with certain questions or problems. According to Popper (1972: 120–121), the powers of critical argument are the powers of reasoning. They are, therefore, the basis of collective development, if only in the form of a bargaining outcome.

Popper, like Bühler before him, held that language functions form a hierarchy in which each presupposes or implies its predecessor but not its successor. For instance, description requires signalling (whether implicitly or explicitly, descriptions rely on sense data) but not argument. However, argument implies expression since it conveys a belief; it is a signal, since it calls for a response (agreement or rebuttal); finally, argument is also description since it is advanced with regard to a specific situation.

Popper (1989: 135) further argued that speakers activate language functions differently, according to antithetical values. Specifically, self-expression is either revealing or concealing, depending on whether it reveals the genuine emotions or feelings of the speaker. Signalling is either effective or ineffective when speakers confuse their hearers. While descriptions are either true or false, arguments are either valid or invalid.

Spillane (1987) completed Popper's hierarchy with the advisory function of language. Since advising presupposes the giving of reasons to justify, confirm, refute or seek new recommendations, it follows that the advisory function entails the argumentative function: in giving advice, speakers argue. When there are good reasons for accepting and following advice, such communication is authoritative; conversely, when a 'recommendation' is imposed upon a listener, this communication (which is in fact an order) is better qualified as authoritarian. Table 1 summarises the proposed hierarchy of language functions and details their content and related values.

In a collective bargaining exchange, protagonists instantiate language functions in one of their two possible antithetical values according to their preferences. These preferences are not necessarily consistent. For example, a newly appointed human resource manager might declare 'There is no legal obligation to provide more than three shift breaks' (true descriptive statement); to this declaration, a union representative may respond disingenuously, trying to take advantage of her interlocutor's recent arrival in

Table 1. A hierarchy of language and values; adapted from Spillane (1987).

Level	Function	Content	Values	
5	Advisory	Recommendations	Cooperation	Control
4	Argumentative	Justifications	Autonomy	Heteronomy
3	Descriptive	Descriptions	Truth	Falsehood
2	Signalling	Stimuli	Effectiveness	Ineffectiveness
1	Expressive	Inner states	Revealing	Concealing

the organisation 'A fourth break has been company policy for the last ten years' (false descriptive statement).

Expressing – the language of feelings

The expressive function of language is at the bottom of Table 1 because it is the most primitive and least regulated form of language (it is also a form that does not require the presence of other people). As mentioned, expressive statements are either revealing (sincere) or concealing (insincere), although listeners cannot ascertain this status. The reputation of theatre and movie actors depends to a large degree on their ability to make confected expressive statements (such as 'I am upset') sound sincere. However, should a general uncertainty develop about expressive language beyond the borders of the acting world, questions of descriptive truth (and falsity) become intractable and arguments about material conditions impossible.

The last five decades have been marked by a growing emphasis on emotive language and a corresponding decline of argument (Bloom, 1987; Joullié and Spillane, 2020: 285ff; Palmer and Hardy, 2000). By starting their propositions with 'I feel', 'it seems to me' and other expressions of comparable meaning, postmodern speakers make their utterances invulnerable to criticism since it is impossible to argue about another person's feelings. In the context of collective bargaining, when speakers elevate feelings to the status of facts (i.e. treat them as descriptions), they not only place their claims on fragile grounds, but also expose themselves to the charges of political incorrectness and hypocrisy. Political incorrectness, because statements about personal feelings are, in varying degrees, likely to upset other people; hypocrisy, because expressions of feelings cannot be judged sincere or insincere. When one interlocutor advances an expressive statement, the other is thereby placed in the unenviable position of a referee having to decide about the status of a move without access to a rulebook. A polite refusal to consider the merits of the statement is a popular response for those with a penchant for rational argumentation (Popper, 1989).

The subjective nature of expressive statements and the impossibility to decide whether they are sincere or insincere acquire special relevance when such communications are employed in bargaining discussions. For instance, because there is no observable entity or force called 'psychological stress' or 'job dissatisfaction', managers and union representatives have no choice but to rely on communications (spontaneous or collected by way of interviews and questionnaires) from employees to evaluate stressful or unpleasant work conditions. Moreover, while stressors typically originate from the external environment, they cannot be divorced from the concerned individuals' perception of

them (Karasek, 1979; Lazarus, 2006). Indeed, while noise is stressful for most people (and is harmful at extreme levels), for some, it is a source of stimulation (modern 'music'). Employer representatives can therefore reject expressive statements like stress reports as resulting from employees' psychological maladaptation or incompetence rather than pertaining to work (or the workplace) itself. Similar comments apply to Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) or mental health claims: in the absence of identifiable physical lesions or trauma - lacking in RSI cases (Spillane, 2017; Spillane and Deves, 1987), ruled out by definition for mental health problems (Szasz, 2004) - such claims are vulnerable to out of hand dismissal by the party against which they are directed (DeFrank and Ivancevich, 1998: 61).

Signalling – the language of effectiveness

According to Popper (1989: 134), signalling takes place whenever an expressive statement of one individual operates upon another as a stimulus and triggers a response from the other individual. Signalling can therefore be voluntary or involuntary. For example, a cry of despair may induce despair in other people. Not all expressions are so 'contagious', however, since expressions of fear can encourage aggressors, while signs of courage typically discourage them. Humans share expressive and signalling language with non-human animals.

Since the two lower functions are always present when the higher ones are present, it is always possible to analyse linguistic phenomena in terms of the lower functions, that is, as expressions or signals. Popper (1972: 120ff) believes this approach is disastrous. In his view, when communication fixates at the level of feelings and signals (or stimuli), the higher functions of language are not activated. Consequently, critical evaluation and reasoning cannot take place and psychological (individual and collective) development becomes impossible. That is, when speakers do not go beyond expression and signalling, they are bound to view the problems they are trying to address as resulting from 'poor communication', a universal (but superficial) pseudo-explanation which does not require speakers to engage in the higher and distinctively human aspects of linguistic interaction. Moreover, by failing to develop arguments, speakers are likely to address so-called 'communication problems' by way of orders: 'My way, or else'. This primitive form of language, which only seeks obedience, does not achieve cooperation and therefore does not belong to an integrative exchange.

Describing – the language of truth

Descriptive language conveys statements about the world. Such statements are required for collective bargaining exchanges to commence because parties first need to agree about the nature of the issues they seek to address. More generally, the quality of a bargaining relationship has been defined as the extent to which parties are able to describe to each other the constraints under which they operate (Brown, 2009: 435). Inevitably, however, disagreement about descriptions arise when parties misrepresent facts (willingly or not). While a divergence of descriptions strains bargaining discussions, it also represents an opportunity to consolidate them provided that the parties agree on a method

to resolve their differences. When carried out successfully, such remedial measures dissolve misunderstandings, clarify the issues at hand and build trust. Since integrative exchanges require cooperation about points at issue and since cooperation (as opposed to manipulative control) cannot be achieved through lies, the bargaining parties' preference for truth or falsity determines whether the proceedings are integrative or distributive.

In bargaining discussions, the issue of truth (or falsity) of descriptions is often difficult to settle. This difficulty arises in part from the metaphorical nature of human language generally and the language of bargaining exchanges specifically. As noted, metaphorical statements possess more suasory power than literal statements; since their intention is to persuade, negotiating parties tend to use them liberally. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the language of negotiations is replete with metaphors, typically derived from the military, gaming and sports arenas (Cohen, 2003; Watson, 2004). Hence, Gordian knots need to be cut and kites flown, while cards that are not kept close to one's chest are at risk of being shot down by negotiators playing hardball or taking the role of the Devil's advocate.

Notwithstanding their suasory effectiveness, metaphorical statements are figures of speech that are not literally true. They are therefore false. Consequently, when metaphors multiply, discussions become confused because speakers no longer mean what they say or say what they mean (Palmer and Dunford, 1996). In terms of the hierarchy presented in Table 1, when confronted with metaphors or ambiguous descriptions, bargaining parties either progress to argument or revert to signalling and expressive language. In the current (postmodern) times of 'post-truth', they are likely to regress. Ambiguous language and metaphorical statements have at least one merit; however, they point to the value and necessity of arguing about descriptions. Cross-critical evaluation of descriptions (the Socratic method) transforms acrimonious exchanges into more mature conversations in which speakers engage in constructive argument. At this stage of a discussion, the higher levels of the linguistic hierarchy come into play.

Arguing – the language of cooperation

Contrary to postmodern belief, arguing is the language of cooperation because arguments enable people to expose justifications and to explain why their opinion and recommendations are valid (Cattani, 2008). Critical arguments clarify problems, expose misconceptions and reveal lies. They also unmask dogmatists and extremists and those who try to present contentious situations as one-sided affairs. Furthermore, argument supports integrative outcomes (Putnam and Wilson, 1989; Roloff et al., 1989). Indeed, bargaining is a process of proposal exchange, development and debate. Integrative bargaining is tentative and exploratory since it aims at enlarging the pool of value to be shared between parties rather than imposing settlement. Since the critical assessment of recommendations and assumptions reveals what alternatives exist, parties seeking integrative outcomes will find in critically reviewing propositions a common process from which new ideas are generated and mutually beneficial solutions appraised.

Employer and employee representatives benefit from developing their argumentative skills. On one hand, valid argumentation enables speakers to convince others of the strength of their case without having recourse to lying, misrepresentation or coercion. On

the other hand, those skilled in critical argumentation see through attempts on the part of others to act in these ways. Unscrupulous labour negotiators can try to set the terms of the debate, frame reality or confuse their counterparts by way of misleading statements, tangential or unrelated considerations and fallacious arguments. Studies such as Kirkbride (1986, 1988) offer examples of exchanges that executives controlled through use of such tactics, which union representatives failed to challenge when they could. Conversely, Rackham and Carlisle (1978a, 1978b) identified labour negotiations in which one party successfully resisted attempts by the other to side-track the discussion by way of compelling and repeated argument.

More generally, the bargaining table is, for some, a forum to demonstrate their verbal skills and impose their views. Argumentative language is therefore a protection against efforts on the part of a speaker to direct discussions towards distributive bargaining when an integrative settlement is in fact possible. Furthermore, knowing that arguing and counter-arguing will take place during discussions minimises the likelihood that bargaining parties will perceive proceedings in terms of domination and submission. In this sense, a shared critical inquiry is a language of mutual recognition (Emmel, 2008) that builds trust between management and union representatives. The sharing of critical arguments and justifications also exemplifies reciprocity in communication, essential when negotiators want to avoid conflict escalation (Putnam and Jones, 1982: 191).

Advising – the language of authority

Advising is the language of authority because asking for (and providing) advice assumes that the advice-giver possesses authoritative knowledge that the advice-seeker does not possess. Authority is especially visible in cases where advice is accepted without decisive evidence or conclusive reason. So-called 'arguments from authority' achieve only so much, however; recommendations normally require justifications, implying that, in the linguistic hierarchy, the advisory function of language is above the argumentative function. Justifications for advice can be implicit or explicit, easily identified or requiring sustained research. For instance, why workers should wear their hardhats on construction sites does not require much, if any, explanation. Why employers should provide workers who wear prescription glasses with free corrective safety spectacles does call for some elaboration, which may (or may not) be effective. Whatever the case, when advice is accepted, authority has been established. As Friedrich (1963) argued, authority arises from reasoned elaboration, that is, from exchanges between individuals cooperatively seeking, evaluating and disseminating knowledge by way of argument, counterargument and critical evaluation.

As Spillane (1987: 221) noted, the language of advice, which relies on such expressions as 'should', 'ought to', 'in the interest of', 'I recommend' and others of comparable intent is close to the language of power, with which it is often confused. In the workplace generally and during collective bargaining exchanges specifically, the difference between authoritative and authoritarian language matters. Indeed, the difference between the language of advice and the language of power reflects the difference between situations where employees accept and behave according to recommendations (because they believe that such behaviour is appropriate) and those situations where employees comply

and behave according to orders. The source of authority thus differs from that of power: those who exercise or aspire to authority seek consent. Those who are happy to coerce others content themselves with commands accompanied by threats.

While employers have power over those they employ so long as they can dismiss them, employees can form or join a trade union to generate power counter to that of their employer. However, even within an adversarial context, might is not right: power not constrained by authority leads to brutality and disregard of human rights. That a collective bargaining process takes place attests to the existence of a desire, shared by employers and employees alike, to bring power under the mitigating control of authority. Indeed, for an organisation to operate, not only does a degree of consensus have to exist within its members on what actions are acceptable and desirable (Barnard, 1968: 168–169), but employers and employees alike must control their behaviour according to general and ad hoc rules, by-laws and implicit norms. Authority is therefore a concession requiring moral agreement: to grant authority is to authorise the exercise of power and to hold individuals responsible for it.

If the minimum condition for the emergence and acceptance of authority is a shared elaboration of reasons, authority is not exclusively vested in the employer, but is found throughout the work organisation. While employers authorise executives to act on their behalf and employees to work, employees authorise employers to direct them. While such authorisations are normally formalised in writing, documents such as employment contracts do not achieve anything in and of themselves. They affect reality only insofar as people adhere to them. Authority within the workplace thus requires some form of continuous, open discussion in which employers and employees (or their appointed representatives) participate. In this respect, a collective bargaining negotiation is an ideal forum in which to establish authority. During bargaining exchanges, employers and union representatives seeking integrative outcomes establish their authority, avoid coercion, share knowledge and appreciate the ethical aspects of the organisation to which they belong. Indeed, when the proceedings resolve in an outcome that is agreed by the parties, that outcome becomes authoritative (Stinchcombe, 1986: 152). In other words, authoritative employer and employee representatives value integrative outcomes over distributive ones.

To executives and employee representatives who believe that negotiations are best run according to a distributive approach because employment is a power struggle, one will retort that the language of authority does not dissolve the conflict in the employment relationship. Rather, the view advanced here is that such a conflict is temporarily and partially subsumable under agreement about a specific policy or management decision. Such situations arise because, even in an adversarial outline, there are cases where policies and decisions are found *reasonable* (in the sense of rational, ethical, desirable and acceptable) by employers and employees alike.

While it is true that a slack job market, tight profit margins and unfavourable economic conditions favour employer representatives during bargaining proceedings, these factors do not, in and of themselves, establish executives' authority. What establishes authority in bargaining discussions is a capacity for reasoned elaboration (argument and critical evaluation), steeped in factual knowledge and logical thinking therefrom. Even if

executive and union representatives do not start from equal premises, establishing authority on work-related problems during bargaining is an objective achievable by all.

In summary, integrative bargaining outcomes require that each side of the bargaining table practises a language of effective signalling, true descriptions and valid reasoning, culminating in authoritative advice. This conclusion assumes that signalling effectiveness is preferred to ineffectiveness, truth to falsity, rationality to irrationality, authoritative advice to authoritarian commands and cooperation to coercion. Although widespread, such preferences are not universal. In any workplace, there will be employees, be they executives, employee representatives, managers or operatives, ready to lie, misrepresent, confuse, manipulate and coerce others in the name of perceived personal, collective or organisational interests. However, since integrative outcomes are recognised as mutually beneficial by the bargaining parties, they are not achieved through manipulative language.

Research implications

Over the last few decades, industrial relations and their governance mechanisms have fundamentally changed. During the 1980s and 1990s, the post-war systems of collective bargaining that Dunlop (1958) and Flanders (1970) theorised as having for objectives the elaboration of rules governing workplace relations have almost disappeared. Human Resource Management (HRM) practices applied across industries and growing body of legislation now dominate industrial relations regimes (Dobbin and Sutton, 1998; Weil, 2014). These changes have been accompanied by a marked decline in union membership across members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020.) and a corresponding weakening of the legitimacy of traditional forms of representation (Upchurch et al., 2016). In the European Union, collective bargaining outcomes on such matters as training, wage moderation and flexibilisation of wage setting and working time have become progressively distributive (Glassner and Keune, 2012).

Since the late 1990s, employers have increasingly adopted flexible 'organic' organisational structures in which decision-making is decentralised, hierarchies flattened and unity of command abandoned for cross-functional teams and matrix structures (Raelin, 2011). The HRM regime still prevails, but the workplace it governs has morphed. Whereas, modernity had replaced farm labour with factory labour and separated the economic sphere (the workplace) from the domestic one (the household), postmodernity (the advent of which coincides with the start of the HRM era) has replaced the bureaucracies the rise of which Weber predicted with ever-changing adhocracies (Joullié and Spillane, 2020: 299–302). Simultaneously, the virtual office and pervasive mobile telecommunications have all but abolished the ideas of fixed working hours and workplace. At home, on the road and ever more rarely at work, employees are now contactable around the clock, 7 days a week, 12 months a year. The work-life balance debates of the Weberian workplace have become discussions about work-life integration (Williams et al., 2016).

If a degree of agreement exists on the nature of the changes that industrial relations settings have endured, analyses diverge about their causes. While most authors locate them in the growing popularity of 'organic' structures (Cosh et al., 2012), others have analysed them as stemming from the rise of identity politics (Bullard and Johnson, 2000; Piore and Safford, 2006). According to this alternative account, the axis of social and

political enrolment has shifted. Rather than being rooted in the workplace allegiances (class, status, profession and industry) that the traditional forms of representation embodied, employee mobilisation now originates from considerations external to the workplace, notably sex, gender, religion, ethnicity, age, disability and other interests promoted by informal 'grassroots' communities. It is noteworthy that, owing to their nature, such considerations rest at least partly on feelings that individuals harbour about characteristics which they believe define them at work and elsewhere.

Deciding which of the aforementioned explanations of changes in industrial relations settings is correct is not a required undertaking of the current essay. More relevant is to observe that the linguistic framework proposed in these pages strengthens the voice of employees seeking solutions to work-related problems and thus contributes to the legitimacy of those who represent them, regardless of their overall setting. Indeed, while integrative outcomes cannot be guaranteed when the other party has decided against them as a matter of principle, the more the voice of employees is conveyed in a language of effective signalling, true descriptions, valid reasoning and authoritative advice, the more it is difficult to ignore. This is especially the case when the issues at hand stem not from industry-wide problems to be dealt with by way of abstract, general legislation or blanket HRM-inspired policy, but rather find their source in organisational specifics the solutions to which are to be found out of practical necessity. Employee representative bodies, regardless of their form, which achieve integrative outcomes legitimate their existence, in the eyes of those they defend as well as in the eyes of those against whom they bargain. To the extent that this article defines the language of integrative discussions, it provides a linguistic basis for such (re)legitimation effort.

Beyond a strengthening of employee voice, the linguistic framework exposed here outlines ways of analysing the language of the employment relationship generally. Three distinct yet interrelated avenues of research present themselves. First, the model acknowledges the communication of feelings, such as those arising from work situations found stressful, yet does not include such a language as an acceptable basis for the formulation of grievances and the justification of policies. Instead of expressions, integrative outcomes rest on statements (reports on organisational performance, number of hours lost to accidents, etc.) and arguments the respective truth and validity of which are critically evaluable and thus acceptable by anyone. While executives and union representatives can use the linguistic analysis offered in the preceding pages as guidelines in their bargaining discussions, researchers can use it to conduct post hoc reviews of these discussions and explain why they succeeded (or failed) to achieve integrative outcomes. It is this usage of the framework that has been emphasised in this article to this point.

Second, the linguistic guidelines outlined in this article allow considerations external to the employment relationship to be brought into bargaining discussions, but only insofar as they can be critically evaluated by the other party and found to be relevant to the workplace. Indeed, if the lowest level of language allowed in bargaining discussions are descriptions that are in principle refutable by those against whom they are directed, parties cannot advance claims stemming solely from their being members of a specific group. Speakers who want to keep identity politics out of bargaining exchanges can press those advancing claims stemming from what they feel is their 'essence' to formulate instead factual descriptions. For their part, researchers wanting to appreciate how

identity politics have made their way into bargaining exchanges can use this article's linguistic framework to analyse the content of these discussions to show the extent to which feelings were allowed in the proceedings. Conducted retrospectively, research conducted on these lines will help answer the question about the causes of the changes in industrial relations settings broached earlier. That is, a historical analysis across industries of the language of bargaining exchanges will reveal the degree to which expressions have come into bargaining proceedings, their nature (i.e. whether they are about sex, ethnicity, religion, etc.), when they started to dominate discussions – assuming they have – and whether this dominance preceded or succeeded the rise of 'organic' structures.

Third, this article's linguistic framework emphasises as bases for integrative bargaining discussions propositions that can be critically evaluated by employer and employee representatives. As such, it provides a firm grounding for assessing the challenges that organic structures generate (rarefaction of career prospects, confusion caused by multiple lines of command, requirement for lifelong learning, blurring of the work-home frontier, etc.) for employees. In this sense, while advocating rationality of argument and soundness of advice, the framework proposed here can be viewed as protection from bureaucratic alienation insofar as it safeguards the identity, integrity and legitimated existence of workers by way of integrative bargaining outcomes. Expressed differently, to the extent that it recommends a rational approach to workplace issues over an irrational one, the analysis offered here outlines is compatible with Weberian industrial relations settings while offering protection against 'iron cage' alienation. Industrial relations scholars attracted by such a prospect can use this article's linguistic framework in their analysis of workplace problems and in the formulation of their solutions.

Conclusion

To the extent that industrial relations settings generally and collective bargaining processes specifically are essentially linguistic arenas, parties to the employment relationship have little choice but to be sensitive to language and its effects on those to whom it is directed. Specifically, parties to collective bargaining will note that integrative outcomes require use of a distinctive language, namely a language of effective signalling, true descriptions, valid reasoning and authoritative advice. While using such language does not prevent distributive outcomes altogether, it conveys the strongest resistance to speakers committed to imposing their views. Moreover, even if ignored during a round of bargaining exchanges, a language of effective signalling, true descriptions, rational argument and authoritative advice strengthens the voice of speakers in future discussions. Authoritative language thus does not ignore or belittle the conflict that lies in the employment relationship. Rather, authoritative language improves the legitimacy of those who speak it and the likelihood that disputes are settled according to their preferences.

Finally, if industrial relations settings require novel forms and processes of employee representation because the postmodern workplace is inimical to traditional trade unions, then research into ways to consolidate such new representative arrangements is especially indicated. Achieving bargaining outcomes that are in the interest of employees legitimates whichever form of representation they use. The linguistic analysis advanced here has therefore practical and research value.

Note

1. The *British Journal of Industrial Relations* has yet to publish an article containing the terms 'bargaining' and 'language' in the title, abstract or body of the text. The *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* has published five studies containing these words, but none which considers language (as distinct from discourse) in collective bargaining as its focal topic. Since its first issue, *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* has published one article in which the word 'language' appears in the abstract (Ubalde and Alarcón, 2020), but in this study, the word means 'tongue'. As for the *Journal of Collective Negotiations*, it did not publish one article with the word 'language' in it over its 36 years of existence.

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2.13 : The decline of authority and the rise of managerialism

The decline of authority and the rise of managerialism

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Abstract

Managerialism, as an ideology and management practice, is grounded on a theory of authority. Such grounding has been neglected in the relevant literature since scholars have generally treated authority as a form of power and have ignored the view that authority is also a source of power. Following a review of the construct of authority as it appears in the works of noted social psychologists and critical management authors, this essay argues that Carl Friedrich's theory of authority as reasoned elaboration reveals two manifestations: authoritativeness and authoritarianism. It is argued here that managerialism draws on authoritarian ideas and practices, whereas management, as traditionally conceived, draws on authoritativeness. To promote authoritative management, therefore, is to resist (authoritarian) managerialism since authority redirects power to technical experts and professional colleagues and thereby limits managerial power.

Keywords

Argumentation, authoritarianism, authoritativeness, authority, power, reasoned elaboration

Introduction

In his survey of the ideological context of employment relations, Godard (2011) identified five perspectives on management, which (taken together) have a left-right political character. On the left of the spectrum, he placed radical Marxism, then (moving incrementally to the right) liberal

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reformism, orthodox pluralism, managerialism and finally neoliberalism. What differentiates orthodox pluralists from managerialist scholars, according to Godard, is the way they conceive of conflict in the employment relationship. While orthodox pluralist scholars consider that conflict is legitimate and requires governance mechanisms, their managerialist counterparts hold it to be illegitimate. Specifically, managerialists regard overt manifestations of conflict in the employment relationship as the result of a misunderstanding on the part of employees or other organisational dysfunctions, including suboptimal management practices. Further (and still according to Godard), the former position characterises the ideology of industrial relations scholarship, the latter that of the human resources management literature. The success of human resources management, as a body of ideas and practices, and the progressive adoption by managers of the managerialist perspective throughout the second half of the 20th century (Clegg, 2014; Dobbin and Sutton, 1998; Doran, 2016; Klikauer, 2019; Shepherd, 2018; Weil, 2014) is compatible with Godard's (2011) analysis.

Notwithstanding its current prevalence, managerialism is rarely promoted as such. To those who endorse it, managerialism is an effective and efficient approach for the reform and running of workplaces based on the principle that organisations pursue goals defined by managers on behalf of all corporate stakeholders (Halligan, 1991; Lee and Lawrence, 2015; Paterson, 1988). Further, managers are equipped with the sort of specialised knowledge and skill that enables them to devise and implement value-free means for achieving relevant objectives.

To critics, the self-referential aspect of a definition according to which managers know best how to achieve the goals they define reveals managerialism as a self-promoting ideology (Klikauer, 2013; Locke and Spender, 2011). To illustrate their criticism, these scholars point to the way managerialists have entrenched themselves in all corners of the power structure of firms, museums, government bodies, universities, hospitals and other public administrations (Baddeley, 2013; Gordon and Whitchurch, 2010; Overeem and Tholen, 2011; Rhodes, 1996; Stolz, 2017). So conceived, managerialism is encountered wherever 'management, as a form and as a process, becomes an end in itself, a self-serving entity' (Barberis, 2013: 327). Further, commentators have noted that although managers are purportedly working in a post-growth era (i.e. in a context of saturated markets, at least in developed economies), they continue to add layers of technocracy to their employing firms, thereby consolidating managerialism (Blühdorn, 2017; Meyer, 2020).

Beyond sprawling technocracy, one of the most notable manifestations of managerialism has been a progressive concentration of power in the hands of professional managers who move between industry sectors (Abbott, 2015; Barberis, 2013; Klikauer, 2013; Locke and Spender, 2011). As executives have secured ever more power and income, middle management has diminished in its relative size and power base (Ehrenreich, 2006; Thomas and Dunkerley, 1999; Wheatley, 1992). Simultaneously, the authority of experts and non-management professionals has eroded (Lynch, 2014; Shepherd, 2018; Smith and Hussey, 2010; Vincent, 2011; Ward, 2011). While these manifestations of managerialism have received sustained attention from researchers, no theory of managerialism, that is, no analysis of its underlying *modus operandi*, has been proposed to date.

Since managerialism entails, in addition to a possible ideological commitment, a form of management, analysing it requires a focus on management as a human encounter. Indeed, as an abstract noun, 'management' denotes a social relationship between managers and the individuals and resources they oversee. As such, analysing management requires a conceptual scheme in which the overseers and those they oversee are established as reference points between which 'management' finds its meaning. To that purpose, social psychologists have studied, theoretically and experimentally, such relational concepts as conformity, obedience, legitimacy, power, influence and authority. Yet, these elements can be present and management absent and none is essential for its presence

(Spillane and Martin, 2005). The challenge for management theorists has been to agree on foundational components which, if correctly identified, provide substance for empirical inquiry. In the relevant literature, two popular research themes have been power and authority.

As Taylor and Van Every (2014: xiii–xvii) have noted, although authority is a concept central to organisational life, the management and organisational communication literature is uninformative. Specifically, Taylor and Van Every (2014: xviii) observe that when authors purport to analyse authority, they typically analyse power. In their works, the two notions are generally linked and not distinguished, resulting in a paucity of empirical studies of authority (as distinct from power) in the management literature. Management historian Kiechel (2012: 73) concurs, commenting that the question of the nature and source of authority, although typically present in the background of management theory, has not received much attention from researchers. Herbst (2006: 285) also noted this neglect when she commented that 'On the nature of authority – what it actually is – we are fairly silent these days, typically unwilling to open what we suspect is a rather densely packed can of slippery worms'. It is patent, she added, that the study of authority in various academic disciplines has become 'oddly unfashionable'.

If analysing management requires a theory of authority, so does studying managerialism since it is a particular form of management practice. Surprisingly, while early analysts of management from the 1930s to the 1960s considered authority in some detail (e.g. Barnard, 1938; Bendix, 1956; Follett, 1926), the role of authority in managerialism is not discussed or even recognised. For example, recent books on managerialism do not list 'authority' in their indexes (e.g. Considine and Painter, 1997; Enteman, 1993; Klikauer, 2013; Locke and Spender, 2011; Parker, 2002; Rees and Rodley, 1995). Treating managerialism as an ideal type, Barberis (2013) does not discuss whether or how managerialism reconciles with authority. Similarly silent is Klikauer, 2013, 2019: 2–3), who argues that managerialism is the (authoritarian) imposition of managerial techniques, thus implicitly equating authority with legitimate power. Rarely explicitly acknowledged, such a view of managerialism as resting on and manifesting in authoritarian practices is in fact widely accepted (e.g. Locke and Spender, 2011; Parker, 2002; Shepherd, 2018).

The central thesis of this essay is that the rise of managerialism is best analysed as a manifestation of the decline of managerial authority and the rise of managerial power within workplaces. This decline, it is argued, has remained largely unnoticed by scholars because of the widespread conflation of power and authority in the management literature. It follows from this thesis that resisting managerialism requires two undertakings. First, it necessitates re-establishing the conceptual distinction between power and authority. As will be explained, this distinction is not to be identified with that of Aristotelian origin and taken up notably (if in differing directions) by Grotius, Hobbes and Spinoza, between *potentia* and *potestas*. Indeed, speaking broadly, these thinkers saw *potentia* as power (capacity to act) and *potestas* as legitimised or lawful power, whether realised or not (Campos, 2012: 89–101). Second, resisting managerialism requires rehabilitating authoritative management as a protection against authoritarian practices. In other words, authoritative management is a defence against managerialism because authority redirects power to technical experts and professionals and thereby limits managerial power (Barley, 1996; Hirschhorn, 1998). Although he has been often misunderstood on this point, Drucker (1972, 1974) did not argue otherwise when he insisted that managerial authority emerges from argumentation and debate as opposed to coercion and authoritarian direction.

It is not a required undertaking of the present essay to ascertain why, from the mid-1970s, research into authority has been replaced by research into power. Nor is it necessary to inquire into the several ways in which power has been conceptualised in the management literature. Authors have already offered such ambitious reviews: notable examples are Anderson and Brion (2014), Fleming and Spicer (2014) and Sturm and Antonakis (2015). Rather, to advance this essay's

argument, a brief history of the concept of authority from ancient Greece to critical management authors, by way of Weber, Barnard, Simon, French and Raven and Arendt is offered. This history shows that authority has two faces: a form of power (as in 'the authorities have decided to close borders') and a source of power (as in 'I do as she says because she is an authority in her field'). It is further argued that this dual nature has remained largely unrecognised in the recent literature, even in the works of noted authors.

One author who did recognise the dual nature of authority is German American political theorist Friedrich (1958, 1963, 1972). An exposition of Friedrich's analysis of authority, implicitly accepted in public administration literature (Plant, 2011) but largely ignored in current management scholarship, is given after this article's historical overview. This exposition shows that Friedrich's perspective provides a parsimonious solution to the problem of disentangling power from authority, an exercise which, in turn, sheds light on the decline of authority and indicates why such decline accompanied the rise of managerialism. The conclusion summarises the overall argument and adumbrates its implications beyond the realm of work organisations.

The two faces of authority: A brief history

Management authors have generally conflated authority and power. Specifically, their standard approach has been to attribute indifferently to authority two meanings, one derived from Weber (1947) and based on legitimate domination, the other derived from Barnard (1938) and based on subordinate concession, or authorisation. Robbins et al. (2018: 656) offer an example of this equivocation when they define authority as 'the rights inherent in a managerial position to tell people what to do and to expect them to do it'. Such a conflation of the two meanings is also frequent in social psychology, with Gilovitch et al. (2019: 428) holding that 'authority is power that derives from institutionalised roles or arrangements'. In both cases, authority is equated with power; a management regime based on such an understanding of authority is 'authoritarian', in the sense that managers' right to command is based on their role in a formal hierarchy.

In some cases, labelling management as authoritarian is noncontroversial, because some authoritarian managers perform effectively and thereby demonstrate their power without being authorised to act as they do. However, if they seek authority as authorisation, managers require reference to others, because they cannot authorise themselves. They must have authority conceded by colleagues and such concession entails considerations of what is acceptable to them. More generally, the exercise of power is bound to affect others who will assess its consequences and evaluate their desirability and acceptability. This evaluation establishes the inseparability, both theoretical and practical, of power and authority and their centrality in management and leadership relationships (Joullié et al., 2021; Spillane and Joullié, 2015). However, this inseparability does not imply that the two constructs should not, or cannot, be meaningfully distinguished. A historical perspective on the development of the two concepts assists in such a delineation effort.

Rome and ancient Greece

Most English political concepts are drawn from Latin, including 'government', 'justice' and 'authority'. The Romans themselves imported these ideas from ancient Greece (Kristeller, 1979). However, in the transfer of abstractions from classical Greek to the more practical Latin, conceptual subtleties were often glossed over. It is fortunate, therefore, that 'authority' has similar derivations in both classical Greek and Latin.

The ancient Greeks thought of authority as the ability to start discussions and bring them to conclusion through argumentation. For example, whereas in Homer *arché* signifies 'initiative'

which 'gets things done' and is manifested as a cause of activity in others, Aristotle wrote of the 'double power' of *arché*, that of initiating matters and bringing them to completion (Barker, 1968). In ancient Greek literature, *arché* is also frequently used to designate 'rule' or 'government', since the term *archon* refers to ruler or governor. This latter use implies that *arché* expresses both the exercise of initiative and the voluntary response to (and acceptance of) such initiatives. It is note-worthy that this habit of applying *arché* to those in positions of power amounts to conflating authority and power.

The translation of *arché* into Latin confirmed the conceptual link with initiative but was ambiv-alent about representing authority as power. This ambiguity set the pattern for authority to be regarded as a special form of power. Indeed, in most Roman writing, authority is firmly linked with command positions, reflecting the political authoritarianism of an era in which rulers held that might constitutes right. However, the Latin translators of *arché* emphasised initiative rather than power; the term they retained derives from *auctor* (originator, promoter, author) and *auctoritas*, which refers to producing, inventing or innovating in the public arena. This Roman fusion of authority and power illustrates the fact that *auctoritas* supplements an act of will by adding reasons to it. In Latin, authority is then more than advice, yet less than command. In this sense, it is advice which cannot be properly disregarded, such as when a doctor advises a patient (Friedrich, 1972: 219).

Following Roman practice, from the early 14th century, authority was associated with individu-als who were recognised as possessing legitimate knowledge, especially of a religious kind (Hall, 1997). This use gave rise to the notion of an 'authoritative viewpoint'. By the 19th century, this meaning was linked to that of 'expert', a person who is regarded as an authority in a certain field. However, Ginsberg (2016: 92) notes that 'if authority weakened in relation to knowledge, it strengthened in relation to power and from the 16th century onwards it is a key political term in a sense that the [Oxford English Dictionary] defines it as "power or right to give orders, make deci-sions, and enforce obedience"'. With this change of emphasis, the scene was set for enduring ambiguity about the two faces of authority: authoritativeness and authoritarian.

Max Weber and Chester Barnard

Weber (1947) argued that the concept of power is the fundamental construct in social sciences. However, he came to regard power as too protean a notion to be useful because all human encoun-ters can be judged to put certain individuals in a position to impose their will on others. He there-fore turned his attention to more specific relationships, notably domination, rulership and legitimacy. Weber's focus is visible in his preference for *Herrschaft* over *Autorität*, which shows that his theory is a theory of (legitimate) rule rather than mere power. Weber's preferred terminol-ogy also implies that to translate *Herrschaft* directly into authority is mistaken because it creates the (misleading) impression that to have a position of formal power is, *ipso facto*, to have authority. This conflation is far from Weber's thought since he considered a power structure to be a system of rule that does not require the assent of those dominated (the confusion surrounding the meaning of *Herrschaft* diminishes if is translated as 'rule').

Weber (1947) conceived of legitimate rule as a relationship between two parties. In manage-ment, these parties are managers and subordinates and the central factor in the relationship is the meaning that the parties attribute to it. An essential component of that meaning is that managers not only issue commands, but they also claim the right to do so. Similarly, the obedience of subordi-nates obtains from their assessment that managers have a right to issue commands and control them within specified parameters. As such, for Weber, unlike the traditional and charismatic claims to legitimacy which are based on appeals to individuals, legal-rational legitimacy is embedded in the

social order. It extends to individuals only insofar as they occupy legitimised roles and, even there, their powers are limited to a 'sphere of competence' which is defined within that social order.

Weber (1947) made rationality a basis for role legitimacy only and considered all personal legitimacy to be based on non-rational criteria. Further, he insisted that there is a fundamental difference between a claim to legitimacy based on technical competence and one based on personal qualities. He argued that charismatics derive their influence from exceptional personal characteristics of a non-rational nature (one can think of the Reverend Jim Jones and his suicide cult to illustrate Weber's point). Yet it is apparent that some managers secure a sizeable following not because of charismatic qualities, but because they propose to solve problems with which others are grappling (such as a competent project manager would in a contemporary IT firm). In other words, Weber's analysis does not easily account for managers who are followed because of their superior ability to address challenging problems. Following individuals because they can resolve dilemmas is rational; doing so does not automatically impose charismatic status upon them but simply indicates that they are authorities in relevant matters (Andreski, 1988).

Opposing Weber is Barnard (1938) who emphasised authority as the foundational concept in management. Authority, Barnard argued, has two aspects: a subjective element represented by the personal acceptance of a directive as authoritative, and an objective element embodied in the content of the communication by virtue of which that communication is accepted. To appreciate this distinction, consider the case of the rookie police officer listening to his sergeant whom he admires and respects and who is also convinced that the substance of what his superior is telling him (on this occasion) is justified. Hence, for Barnard, authority lies with those to whom it applies, because it represents the willingness and capacity of individuals to submit to the necessities of organisation. Accordingly, a manager does not have authority. Rather, authority rests with organisational communications and their assent from those to whom they are directed.

Barnard (1938) believed that assent is a necessary and sufficient condition for a management relationship to be classed as one of authority. This position is, however, untenable. A more accurate analysis reveals that if assent is indeed a necessary condition for the management relationship to be classed as one of authority (which, for Barnard, implies willingness), it is not a sufficient condition. For example, if a manager (A) threatens a colleague (B) with dismissal if B does not behave illegally as instructed, B may assent to A's demands, but it cannot be claimed that A is exercising authority. The denial rests on the argument that B's situation was created by A's use of a form of power which runs counter to authority.

As a practicing manager, Barnard was struck by the frequency with which managerial directives are disobeyed. This observation led him to ask how it is possible for managers to secure consistent and sustained cooperation if the acceptance of authority rests with subordinate colleagues. His answer is that those who gain advantages from the organisation's rewards actively support the maintenance of authority therein. That is, for Barnard (1938: 168–169), the informal shared view of the work community makes individuals reluctant to question authority that is within what he called their 'zone of indifference'. In this zone, employees uncritically accept orders because such missives are deemed to be consistent with the tasks implicitly accepted when they became employees. The formal instantiation of this principle is the commonly accepted, but nonetheless mistaken, view that authority comes from above. Seen in this light, authority is another name for the willingness to submit to the necessities of organisations. Conversely, disobedience of an instruction by an employee to whom it is addressed is an effective denial of its authority and amounts to challenging the organisation's structure, processes and objectives.

Weber (1947) acknowledged that assent is a factor in relationships of *Herrschaft*, even when it rests on coercion. On his view, such a situation is an outlier case, because he held that there is always an irreducible element of voluntary compliance in authoritarian relationships. However,

what is an extreme case for Weber is the fundamental nature of authority for Barnard (1938: 164), for whom the army is the 'greatest of all democracies' because soldiers personally decide to follow orders. Barnard combined this position with his view of the 'fiction of superior authority' and thus rejected traditional models of authority based on (legitimate) power. As Perrow (1986: 81) noted though, the fiction of the superior authority is 'hardly a fiction if one can be fired for disobeying orders or shot for not moving ahead on orders'.

In summary, while Weber was ambivalent about the power of bureaucracy, Barnard was optimistic because, for him, bureaucracy is essentially a cooperative, democratic and benign contribution to human progress. In Weber's case, bureaucracies are power structures that are legitimated by rational values, run by technical experts and defined by the principle of hierarchy. In Barnard's case, bureaucracies are communicative processes which apprise managers of relevant information and inform them of their responsibilities; in his analysis, neither legitimacy nor hierarchy plays a significant role. However, by making acceptance of managerial communications crucial, Barnard ignored the difference between 'authority' based on coercion and authority based on the rational evaluation of communications. There is no place in Barnard's theory for rational argumentation.

Herbert Simon

Although there are similarities between Weber's and Barnard's theories of authority, the general tendency in the management literature is to see them as champions of incompatible perspectives. One exception to this observation is Simon (1976), who argued for a convergence of Weber's and Barnard's views. For Simon, such an attempt is possible because Weber's and Barnard's distinctions between power and authority are phenomenological. Indeed, for both authors, the reasons for obedience stem from subordinates' perceptions of the managerial role as legitimate rather than coercive.

In line with his general commitment to logical positivism, Simon (1976) believed that authority should be defined objectively and assessed using behaviouristic protocols. Specifically, he argued that it is only when an unambiguously observable and codified interaction between a manager and subordinates occurs that authority exists: authority exists when managers command with the expectation that the command will be obeyed. Subordinates, in obeying the order, hold in abeyance their own critical judgements for evaluating it. Whilst Simon's theory begs the question concerning the motivation behind the suspension of critical evaluation, his definition embraces the reality of organisational elements and corporate goals, in the name of which employees defer critical evaluation.

Authority, for Simon (1976: 151–152), is one of several forms of influence. Its distinguishing characteristic is that it does not necessarily seek to convince subordinates but gain their acquiescence. That is, when decisions and commands are questioned, it is the authority figure who has the last word in the disagreement. Elsewhere, Simon (1976: 125) indicated that authority is a kind of power, 'the power to make decisions which guide the actions of another'.

In claiming that authority is a form of influence and power, Simon paradoxically drew attention to a deficiency in his own conception. Specifically, Simon's view does not allow distinctions to be made between authority, power and influence. Yet not only are these distinctions desirable considering the use of these terms in everyday language, but they are also required. Indeed, rigorous analysis necessitates that categories be distinct, their population specifiable and their use consistent. Moreover, Simon's conception does not account for the possibility of a gradation of acceptance. For example, if a kitchen hand is asked by his fast-food manager to precook thirty burgers even though no such customer order has been received, he may share her desire to anticipate the evening peak hour, but not to prepare so many meals in advance. In other words, it is possible (in

fact commonplace) that employees only partially embrace the reasoning which underpins their managers' directions. Yet Simon wanted to exclude from his notion of authority those situations where subordinates examine and evaluate the merits of a manager's proposals and become convinced that the proposals should be carried out. If Simon were correct, circumstances where subordinates give independent evaluation of, and agreement with, a manager's orders would not be instances of authority, even though subordinates would carry out those orders.

In his book, Simon (1976) adopted at least five definitions of authority (p. 11, 22, 125, 128, 151). Following Barnard, he ended up introducing in his model the subjective reactions of subordinates, implying that authority is present where obedience anticipates as well as follows commands (in which case, observed behaviour is not sufficient to demonstrate an authority relationship, contrary to Simon's behaviouristic premises). Further, Simon followed Weber and Barnard in identifying confidence (technical skill) and legitimisation where authority is present, adding social approval together with sanctions and rewards. As with Barnard, these additions conflate authority with power.

Like Simon's, attempts to define authority in purely objective terms inevitably lead to an over-generalisation of the concept and gloss over explanatory distinctions in human behaviour. Nevertheless, Simon set a trend which most social psychologists have followed when they commenced their analyses with the inclusive notion of power and attempted to derive the concept of authority from it (Cartwright, 1959; French and Raven, 1959). Understandably so: as Cartwright (1959: 184) noted, 'the general trend toward defining [power] so as to include many forms of social influence [including authority] ought to reduce substantially social psychologists' reluctance to employ it in describing social interaction'. There are, however, risks in equating social power with authority. These risks are particularly visible in the well-known typology of French and Raven (1959).

French and Raven

According to French and Raven (1959), social power comes in five forms: referent (or attraction); reward; coercive; legitimate; expert. Although widely and uncritically quoted in management textbooks (e.g. Bolman and Deal, 2017; Robbins et al., 2018), this decomposition of power's bases is not satisfactory. Indeed, to be independent, the five categories must be operationally defined narrowly and mutually exclusively. However, French and Raven did not respect this imperative. The lack of independence in their categories (bases) can be seen in the relationship between referent, expert and legitimate power in both the theoretical and empirical literature (e.g. Lyngstad, 2017). Further, reward and coercive power do not depend on the consent of the subordinate party, whereas legitimate, expert and referent power cannot operate without the active concurrence of subordinates. This difference shows that French and Raven's five bases of social power reduce to two categories: 'power' (coercive and reward) and 'authority' (referent, expert and legitimate).

Furthermore, French and Raven's (1959: 151) use of the term 'legitimate' is confusing. Indeed, legitimate power, for them, arises because one group of people believes that another party has a right to prescribe behaviour (in their words: 'legitimate power is based on the perception by [person A] that [person B] has a legitimate right to prescribe behavior for him'). This definition implies a normative basis (typically moral) and thus allows for the term 'right' to be considered phenomenologically (i.e. subjectively): what is a 'right' prescription for one individual may not be so for another. However, French and Raven's definition also allows 'right' to be received in a narrower, legalistic sense. Since French and Raven distinguished legitimate power from referent power (which includes subjective elements), it is safe to conclude that they employed the term

'legitimate' in its second, more exclusive sense. Given such context, to avoid confusion, a better expression would have perhaps been 'legal power'. Whatever the case, French and Raven's conceptual imprecision has resulted in theorists often defining authority as legitimate power and thus identifying authority with formal power. This identification in turn leads to the view that referent and expert power are somehow of a different order to the notion of authority, muddying further the conceptual waters. One author who sought to clarify them and distinguish authority from power is Hannah Arendt.

Hannah Arendt

In a noted essay 'What is Authority?', Arendt (1961) discussed not what authority is but what it was. Indeed, on her view, 20th-century Western society is in the middle of a crisis triggered by the disappearance of authority. She argued that this vanishing is itself the consequence of the decline, almost to the point of extinction, of authority's two historical sources: religion (which has been secularised) and tradition (which is seen as outdated). Manifestations of these phenomena include people losing their sense of life purpose and the pervasive impression that society is bereft of order and stability (Arendt, 1961: 95).

Contrasting authority with power, Arendt (1961: 93) noted that authority 'precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed'. She (Arendt, 1961: 102–103) observed that 'if violence fulfills the same function as authority – namely, makes people obey – then violence is authority'. Indeed, for her (Arendt, 1961: 106), 'authority implies an obedience in which men retain their freedom'. However, Arendt (1961: 93) added that authority 'is incompatible with persuasion, which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation. Where arguments are used, authority is left in abeyance'. This dual incompatibility (with both power and reason) of authority allows Arendt to argue against a return to the ancient Greek conceptions of Plato and Aristotle.

For Plato, Arendt (1961: 107–110) explained, authority cannot come from persuasion and argument. Indeed, if persuasion and argument could establish authority, Socrates' trial (which saw him receive the death penalty for allegedly corrupting Athens' youth) would have consecrated him as an exemplary citizen. Rather, Platonic authority, in Arendt's reading of *The Republic*, comes from truth, because the self-evident nature of truth compels the mind in ways that are stronger than persuasion and argument. However, only the few (the philosopher-kings) can know and thus be subject to the authority of the truth; the multitude, which is easily swayed by myths, cannot be trusted to do the same. Ultimately, Arendt concluded, the establishment of Platonic authority requires violence (the same conclusion obtains from Plato's later attempts to ground authority on laws, which will inevitably have to be enforced).

Aristotle's solution to the problem of establishing authority fares no better than Plato's in Arendt's (1961: 118–119) analysis. Indeed, just like Plato's, Aristotelian authority assumes a division between rulers and the ruled, with educators (and by extension, experts and scientists) playing the role of the philosopher-kings by imposing knowledge on their students. The violence inherent in Greek authority, Arendt (1961: 120–123) held, is best understood when viewed against the Roman conception. Specifically, Roman authority did not require coercion because it was conceived of as flowing from the city's sacralised ancestors (Romulus in particular) to its citizens by way of the Senate. That is, Rome was thought as not having been simply built but authored and this glorious foundation infused Roman life with a collective spirit that guided its development. Roman authority thus united past and future generations through the acceptance of, and commitment to, a mythical vision.

In summary, on Arendt's account, authority has permanently died out. Further, neither truth, nor persuasion, nor argument, nor science will assist Western society in overcoming the existential crisis that the loss of authority triggered. Similarly, religion and tradition will not remedy the malaise since they are no longer authoritative. To alleviate the disappearance of authority, Arendt (1961: 136ff) placed her hopes in modern revolutions. Indeed, in the last pages of her essay, she argued that the American Revolution, with its ideals of freedom and justice enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, exemplifies the sort of political event capable of providing the foundations for society's rejuvenation.

Irrespective of the merits of Arendt's overall thesis, her conclusion underlines that her 'authority' only tangentially (i.e. terminologically) connects with 'authority' as understood by Weber, Simon and French and Raven. Indeed, her effort to distinguish authority from power lead her to divorce the two concepts entirely. Furthermore, she argued that authority is part foundational myth and part political vision but did not identify a psychological process (such as reason or persuasion) ensuring its acceptance. Arendt's conception embeds ideals that bring citizens together and ultimately create social cohesion, but she did not explain why people should embrace them. However, and whatever Arendt's authority is precisely, her (somewhat self-contradicting) argument to the effect that establishing authority by way of argument, reason and knowledge entails oppression has not been without legacy. It has notably survived in critical management studies.

Critical management studies

Since their inception in the early 1990s, critical management studies have produced a multifaceted body of scholarship that resists simple classification. Despite the diversity of the phenomena they research, critical scholars share a concern to reveal the noxious psychological, social and environmental consequences of firms, organisational life and economic systems. Inspired by the work of Michel Foucault, critical authors generally conceive of administrations, hospitals, prisons, universities and private corporations as not just institutions but structures sustained by the generation of power. From this perspective, such institutions are ideology driven. As such, they are oppressive and dehumanising in nature despite their purported contributions to society or the humane (and often team-based) processes they ostensibly adopt as alternatives to traditional command-and-control power structures (Barker, 1993; Grey and Willmott, 2005; Joullié and Gould, 2021).

Another precept shared by most critical management authors stems from the view, of poststructuralist origin, that language is itself a structure (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Green and Li, 2011). Accordingly, grammar, syntax, vocabulary, spelling and symbols do not liberate through the acts of the (self-)expression they make possible. Rather, these elements oppress and alienate, in that individuals must invoke language to reflect on themselves and other phenomena. Even logic and rationality, since they require and proceed through symbols, are suspected of being vehicles of domination and dehumanisation (Appelrouth and Edles, 2011). Applied to organisation studies, this reasoning reveals that management theories, concepts, processes, discourses and phrases (e.g. the expression 'human resources') are instruments of enslavement that turn organisations into psychic prisons (Barker, 1993; Morgan, 2006). Further, by way of ever more pervasive organisational communications, products and practices, managerial discourses creep out of corporations and colonise society. In so doing, they corrupt the educational system, invade stealthily people's thinking and ultimately threaten democracy (Deetz, 1992). Managerial authority, since it is essentially discourse-based, belongs to the corporate-managerial arsenal and is not grounded in objective, value-free and rational knowledge. Rather, it is an auxiliary to power, one of the means through which managers dominate, manipulate and control employees. As Adler et al. (2007: 136) note, 'Power

within firms is not merely an overlay on a rational authority structure: the firm is essentially an exercise of coercive power'.

Scholars embracing the perspective advanced by the Montréal School of organisational communication have sought to complement the conception of authority as a purely managerial phenomenon (Benoit-Barné and Cooren, 2009; Taylor and Van Every, 2014). For such researchers, organisations are realised, experienced and identified primarily in, and thus constituted by, communicative events and processes (Kärreman, 2001). These events and processes entail such elements as conversations, symbols, metaphors, buildings and other artefacts, each considered as a 'text' that organisational members 'read' (Cooren et al., 2011; Putman and Nicotera, 2009). On these bases, authority is a process which authors organisational members' legitimacy, identity and purpose (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2011; Taylor, 2011). Such outcomes are not fixed, however. For example, collaborative work is an organisational encounter in which authoring and de-authoring processes play out, creating and erasing lines of authority, defining and redefining how work is to be accomplished (Koschmann and Burk, 2016).

Further, scholars aligned with the Montréal School conceive of texts and communicative events as performative in the sense that their mere realisation and existence produce results independently of those who create, enact or read them. As such, and according to Actor Network Theory (Latour, 2005), agency is not exclusively a property of living systems but also a feature of texts and communicative events. This view implies that communications (broadly conceived), symbols, abstractions and material objects are all authoritative texts (Kuhn, 2008). They possess and exert authority, which is manifested when they are exhibited, referred to or invoked during conversations; Benoit-Barné and Cooren (2009) call such processes 'presentification'. Authoritative texts also act through individuals, as is the case for example when an official speaks on behalf of 'The White House'.

The view of authority as a bundle of (de)-authoring processes acting on and through organisational members is in keeping with the conception that language is itself an element of a broader power structure. Accepting the constitutive role of communications thus leads to viewing authority as producing, rather than being produced by, employees' roles, identities and legitimacy. Despite their desire to advance novel conceptions of authority, scholars of the Montréal School have thus fallen back on the view shared by most critical management authors. They conceive of authority as being endowed with its own power and agency, the effects of which are practically and conceptually indistinguishable from those of the general power structure. Indeed, as Benoit-Barné and Cooren (2009: 9 and 28) assert, not only is 'power (and, by implication, authority) [distributed] among organizational members', but also 'authority [. . .] consists of a specific way of exerting power'.[1] Hence, for all intents and purposes, critical management scholars, whether affiliated with the Montréal School or not, do not propose a theory of authority differing substantially from that of mainstream management authors: they conceive of authority as a form of power.

Carl Friedrich: Authority as reasoned elaboration

One of the earliest critics of the conflation of power and authority is Friedrich (1958, 1963, 1972). Teaching full time at Harvard from 1926, then alternatively at Harvard and the University of Heidelberg from 1956 until his retirement in 1971, Friedrich wrote on public administration, political theory and totalitarianism. Noted for his knowledge of German constitutional history, he advised the US occupying forces during de-Nazification and participated in the drafting of West Germany's post-war constitution (Berger, 1984). Friedrich's lifelong concerns included the reconciliation of bureaucracy with personal and professional responsibility, the respective roles (and scope for decision-making) of policymakers and administrators, and the possibility for

administrators to engage in public argument and debate (Plant, 2011). Uniting these concerns is his theory of authority.

Observing that authority has been juxtaposed to freedom, or to force, or to reason, Friedrich (1958: 29) lamented that '[authority] has been praised and condemned in all these contexts, and as a result, the word has been incorporated in a pejorative adjective, "authoritarian", and linked as a general characteristic to "personality" as an objectionable and eradicable trait'. More specifically, Friedrich disagreed with the proposition that authority should be defined in terms of power, legitimate or otherwise. On his view, the true nature of authority has been obscured by the pejorative term 'authoritarian' which does not refer to someone possessing authority, but rather to someone pretending to do so. Further, Friedrich argued that while there are greater or lesser degrees of reasoning, and hence rationality, involved in authority relationships generally, attempts to identify authority with the irrational miss the fundamental point that authority is, by etymology and definition, related to reason. Largely overlooked by management scholars, Friedrich's work deserves rescuing from oblivion (an effort to which Herbst, 2006; Plant, 2011; Spillane and Joullié, 2015 have contributed).

Like Barnard, Friedrich defined authority as a quality of communication rather than of a person. Unlike Barnard, however, Friedrich (1963: 224) conceived of authority as the quality of a communication that is capable of reasoned elaboration. This capacity for reasoned elaboration is in terms of 'the opinions, values, beliefs, interests and needs of the community within which the authority operates' (Friedrich, 1963: 226). In authority relationships, the communication requesting acceptance is recognised as being supported by reasons why the request is a desirable one. Such a requirement also applies to a power wielder. However, a crucial difference is that power wielders have the option to enforce obedience without engaging in reasoned elaboration. To put it differently, subordinates do not necessarily perceive the situation as indicating that reasoned elaboration will be forthcoming or even required.

For Friedrich (1963: 161), power is manifested in the context of relationships and is indexed through observing change in the behaviour of those to whom it is directed. Although conceptually independent, power and authority are therefore closely related. Further, they can both be analysed in terms of obedience. Indeed, as Friedrich noted, much institutionalised power is maintained without individuals elaborating or justifying their directions. However, a line of demarcation can still be drawn between them because, for Friedrich, authority is a source of power rather than a form of power. That is, authority is a quality of individuals that enhances their power but is not itself power. Hence, to be authoritative, a power wielder must offer convincing reasons for a proposed course of action, taking account of the interests, beliefs and values of those to whom the arguments are directed. In this sense, managers who have 'lost their authority' have lost a form of their power because their communications are degraded. Such situations arise when managers cease to engage in reasoned elaboration or because the values of the community have changed, making their arguments less convincing (Friedrich, 1963: 226–227).

Friedrich criticised Weber for equating authority (capacity for reasoned elaboration) with legitimacy. As he put it, 'authority as the capacity for reasoned elaboration is capable of creating legitimacy wherever it provides good reasons for the title to rule' (Friedrich, 1963: 236–237). Furthermore, authority helps to legitimise power because the capacity to issue communications, with an appropriate convincing rationale, embraces the right to rule. Authority thus buttresses legitimacy. Authority is not legitimate power as Weber would have it, for legitimate power exists in various forms without a capacity for reasoned elaboration. In workplaces, what is required is a rationale for following managers: a demonstration or a conviction that managers can provide guidance and successfully direct others towards group goals.

Friedrich (1963: 127) also criticised Barnard for unduly extending a theory of informal organisation to remedy the defects of his theory of formal organisation. This extension adversely affected

his theory of authority because he had to make dubious assumptions. For example, Barnard broadened the concept of cooperation to cover all situations in which people work together, including those that involve coercion. Instead, Friedrich argued that a distinction should be made between 'cooperative' and 'directive' styles of managing. In the cooperative (or authoritative) organisation, the contributions of all relevant colleagues are elicited and voluntarily made; in the directive (or authoritarian) organisation, they are ordered and enforced. More generally, Friedrich held against Barnard that he glorified work organisations by claiming that authority is accepted willingly and does not exist at all unless it is so granted. In such an analysis, disruptive factors are either viewed in positive terms or minimised. The problem areas of organisational life – power, conflict, competing ideologies – are thus either ignored or left to be dealt with by authoritarian executives.

When considered in Friedrich's sense, authority is distinct from the use of power and coercion that is typically implied in the notion of 'authoritarian'. Indeed, for Friedrich (1972: 116), an 'authoritarian' (manager) is one who orders rather than argues, directs rather than advises, commands rather than suggests, to make colleagues conform and obey. In management, authority is enhanced if all parties have relevant knowledge and communicate it to each other. The crucial element is the perceived rationality of communications and their ability to solve problems. As such, the authority of managers increases when organisational solutions are offered through reasoned elaboration and acted upon. That is, 'The fact that [a manager's] decisions, commands or other communications could be reinforced by reasoned elaboration relating them to established values and beliefs will lend [the manager's] acts that "authority" without which discretion becomes arbitrary abuse of power' (Friedrich, 1958: 45). Authoritative managers, therefore, recognise their responsibility for discretionary acts as an obligation to retain their regard for reasoned elaboration. 'Once this regard is lost – and it may be lost by [managers] at large no longer accepting reason as a guide – the night of meaningless violence is upon us' (Friedrich, 1958: 48).

Friedrich extended his conception of authority to embrace situations where people (communication receivers) adopt a speaker's belief without due justification. He quoted approvingly Lewis (1849: 6–7) definition of authority: 'He who believes upon authority, entertains the opinion, simply because it is entertained by a person who appears to him likely to think correctly on the subject'. This definition extends the analysis of authority into the psychological arena and by so doing emphasises the concessional elements of an authority-based relationship. Friedrich's insistence on such psychological aspects, when applied to Weber's sociological analysis, raises anew the question of whether authority (in Friedrich's sense of reasoned elaboration) can exist in legal-rational organisations (bureaucracies). Indeed, in bureaucracies, the informal authority of technical experts is bound to conflict with the more ensconced formal authority of managers. In practice, the effects technical experts have on managerial authority will differ in degree according to the matter being addressed. For example, the best way to achieve a group goal is more likely to be open to critical discussion than reflection on the relevance of the goal itself.

If workplaces are legal-rational entities (which admittedly is not always the case), the contribution of authority figures is essential to their survival and prosperity. Power, legitimate or otherwise, is thus an insufficient basis for organisational effectiveness because, to be effective, managers need to supplement their legitimate power with authority which is vested in communications that are capable of reasoned elaboration and persuasively disseminated. As work organisations are fundamentally dependent on the cumulation of knowledge, the contribution of authoritative individuals is indispensable. On this view, managerial authority is grounded on technical and persuasive skills.

Support for the view that managerial authority is underpinned by technical and persuasive skills comes from Popper (1962, 1996), for whom argument is the basis for personal and social development. As such, Popper would be critical of managers who ignore or reject argument in their work. Such rejection typically takes two forms. First, authoritarian managers eschew argument preferring

to invoke orders or threats: 'Do this, or else'. Second, some managers who do not embrace argument encourage colleagues to express their feelings. For Popper, each kind of argument-rejection tactic is disastrous. Indeed, if language is viewed merely as expression of directives or feelings, managers neglect the fact that through language they offer true or false statements and produce valid or invalid arguments. Besides, while management language is largely descriptive, descriptions are often ambiguous, biassed, incomplete or unduly laced with metaphors (Cohen, 2003). Managerial statements thus call for clarification, argument and criticism (understood here as a truth-finding process; cf. Popper, 1996: 91).

Managerialism and authority

In workplaces, a consequence of treating authority exclusively as a form of power is to confine its attribution to managers, as if only managers could have authority. Further, the neglect of authority as a source of power leads to the view that non-managerial technical experts are not authorities in their fields. However, while managerial power is concerned with the ability to rule, the recognition of individuals as authoritative owing to their special knowledge or skill does not imply a claim or ability to rule. A distinction needs to be made, therefore, between managers as formal authorities and (non-managerial) employees, experts and other professionals as informal authorities.

The basis of professional authority is technical knowledge and competence. As such, authoritative professionals act as a source of innovation by providing managers with effective ways of achieving organisational goals. As a matter of orthodoxy, managers are supposed to uphold the correct ways of doing things whilst also (paradoxically) scanning the environment for better ways. In these circumstances, the contributions of professionals, provided they accord with organisational aims, should receive managerial support. Such context sets the scene for a delicate act of managerial balancing. On the one hand, the expertise of professionals and the way it contributes to organisational performance consolidates managerial power. On the other hand, as a source of power, professional authority weakens managerial power. One way to eliminate such tension is to claim both expertise and ability to rule, that is, to claim both authority and power through resort to the notion of hierarchical position. Managerialism, the perspective of management which is grounded on the principle that managers simultaneously have the ability and right to rule owing to their role and superior knowledge, rests precisely on such claims.

The neglect of Friedrich's analysis of authority and the widespread conflation of power and authority, reviewed earlier, have inhibited a scholarly analysis of managerialism as resting on a theory of authority. However, not all scholars have neglected to study the degree to which managerialism reconciles with, or at least makes room for, authoritative workplace relationships. Indeed, the question is implicit in MacIntyre's (2007) well-known critique of bureaucratic management. According to MacIntyre (2007: 86), managerialists:

> 'justify themselves and their claims to authority, power and money by invoking their own competence as scientific managers of social change [and their] mode of justification [. . .] lies in the appeal to his (or later her) ability to deploy a body of scientific and above all social scientific knowledge organized in terms of and understood as comprising a set of universal law-like generalizations'.

For MacIntyre (2007), whatever bureaucratic managers have, they do not possess the keys to an imaginary kingdom. In other words, they do not have access to specialised knowledge and their attempts to present themselves as morally neutral guardians of effectiveness and efficiency are jejune. Managerialists have therefore a vested interest in concealing or diminishing the presence of

institutional conflict and in avoiding rational argumentation and debate. Indeed, not only are such exchanges unpredictable and thus unmanageable, but they also risk damaging the image of the managerialist as an expert in human affairs, technical expert in business, social scientist and 'leader'. One way for managerialists to protect themselves from such damage is to double down on their claim to authority as institutionalised power.

In addition to overt, if unsophisticated, assertions of power, insidious avenues exist for managerialists to (try to) control their colleagues. One such avenue obtains from the growing emphasis on emotive language and the corresponding decline of argument that have characterised the last decades (Joullié and Spillane, 2020; Palmer and Hardy, 2000). The opportunity therefore exists for managerialists to conduct meetings during which participants are encouraged to share their feelings, opinions and values with each other and engage in what amounts to group (pseudo) psychotherapeutic sessions. However, emotion-venting meetings of such kind vitiate decision-making because feelings are private and inscrutable and thus cannot be critically evaluated. Further, when emotional catharsis takes priority over rational deliberation, exchanges are not conducive to producing fact-based challenges to managerialist power. Besides, 'expressive' meetings facilitate the pursuit of Machiavellian, manipulative goals. Specifically, they are liable to being interpreted as evidence of the caring attentions of managerialists, or a sleight of hand in which employees are given the false impression that they are being consulted on consequential issues. By way of contrast, authoritative managers (in Friedrich's and Popper's sense) actively encourage and promote argument for including employees' perspectives on mission-relevant matters and rational decision-making related thereto.

Often misunderstood on this point (e.g. Gantman, 2005), Drucker (1972, 1974) was critical of managerialism and advanced views compatible with those of Friedrich. For example, Drucker (1972) predicted that professional experts (or 'knowledge workers') would become major contributors to organisational effectiveness and managers would need to recognise and reward their authority. Further, he warned against the expanding power of cost centres relative to profit centres and the dangers of bureaucratic management and the centralisation of managerial power. Drucker also argued that managers should replace external control with internal control arguing, with existentialists, that managers should promote freedom and personal responsibility at work (Joullié and Spillane, 2020). On his view, granting employees responsibility for continuous improvement in their jobs enhances corporate performance. Finally, Drucker agreed indirectly with Friedrich (and Popper) that authoritative management requires a language that emphasises valid reasoning and culminates in authoritative advice.

The defence of authority offered in this article is not a naïve or thinly disguised endorsement of a pro-management position, itself stemming from an uncritical adherence to a unitarist perspective of the employment relationship (Godard, 2011). Indeed, promoting authority does not imply, as managerialists have it, that managers can be trusted to make decisions benefitting the entire workplace on the assumption that no fundamental divergence of interests exists within it. Rather, establishing authority as a bulwark against managerialism amounts to saying that workplace conflicts are temporarily and partially subsumable through negotiation and the finding of common ground. Such a context exists because, even where long-term interests diverge, reasoned elaboration (a process that entails argument and debate) allows employers and employees to find ad hoc utilitarian courses of action that each party accommodates (Joullié and Spillane, 2021). Expressed differently, authority as a source of power stemming from reasoned elaboration is not a managerial prerogative but exists at each level of a workplace hierarchy. What creates authority is a capacity and inclination for dialogue and critical evaluation, arising from circumstantial knowledge, expertise and the application of logical thinking. Those who aspire to authority expose their reasons, value critical exchanges and seek consent, a process which is conducive to professional

development (Joullié et al., in press). Conversely, those, like managerialists, who habitually coerce or control others, content themselves with commands accompanied by threats.

In summary, managerialism as a management practice is characterised by authoritarian forms of control rather than workplace relationships based on authoritativeness. As management mutated into managerialism, senior managers secured more decision-making power, middle managers were eliminated and technical experts ignored. So long as authority is analysed as a form of power and the view that it is a source of power is neglected, those who lament the rise of managerialism will remain unable to interpret it as stemming from a decline of authority. In other words, resisting managerialism entails the restoration of authority as a source, and not a form, of power.

Conclusion

This essay has argued that management authors have generally considered managerial authority as a form of power. On their view, the two concepts are conflated because they conceive of the right to command as grounded on control and coercion. Authority, in this sense, merges with 'authoritarian'. A second, overlooked view of managerial authority considers the realisation of organisational goals along with psychosocial factors. Such consideration requires a definition of authority which includes subjective and concessional aspects and links authority with authorisation, in turn pointing to an evaluative process. It is noteworthy that this second view of managerial authority is compatible with the first, insofar as imposing authority (by way of the exercise of power) on someone requires prior concession by others of the authorisation to do so.

The most influential proponent of the 'concessional' view is Barnard (1938) who argues that authority rests with those to whom it applies. Such a conception of authority requires assent and entails that the effects of authority are cancelled by dissent. Further, because power cannot be dissolved by mere dissent, Barnard's view entails a conceptual separation of authority from power. Largely neglected by management authors, Friedrich (1963) proposes an analysis which expands on and refines Barnard's concessional view of authority. Specifically, in keeping with the way the Romans and ancient Greeks understood the term, authority is for Friedrich a capacity for reasoned elaboration, that is, for a justification, through argument and debate, that is found to be rational, reasonable and convincing. Understood in this way, authority applies to communications, not to persons. It is notable that Popper's (1962) view of personal and societal development by way of open, critical exchanges is compatible with and supports Friedrich's thesis. So does Drucker's (1972, 1974) promotion of decentralised decision-making, semi-autonomous work groups and workmanship expertise.

As it emerges from the work of Barnard, Friedrich and Popper, authority develops from cooperative exchanges between managers and colleagues. Authoritative management, therefore, requires valid reasoning and critical argument. Such initial commitments culminate naturally in authoritative advice. This conclusion holds to the extent that there is a general preference for truth over falsity, rationality over irrationality, authoritative advice over authoritarian commands and cooperation over coercion. In the age of managerialism, that is, of forceful implementation of (and allegiance to) managerial techniques, elimination of middle managers and silencing of technical expertise, such preferences cannot be taken for granted. It is, however, through the defence and revival of these preferences that the tide of managerialism can be reversed.

Multi-faceted consequences of managerialism have been observed in corporations, hospitals, museums, universities, government and other aspects of community life. Underpinning these well-documented phenomena is a neglect of authority as a source of power and a parallel decline of authoritative workplace relationships. However, the weakening of authority (and the accompanying growing disregard for argument) is noticeable in other, less researched, areas. For example, as

debate about climate change and the current Covid-19 pandemic illustrates, the contemporary media and political landscape comes with a new breed of ideologue who, aided by public relations specialists, not only ignores but publicly ridicules expert voices. Authority as a source of power is thus not simply a scholarly theme, or a managerial preference. Indeed, as Popper argued, it is also a social and democratic concern. Therein lies a fertile research agenda.

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Note

1. Benoit-Barné and Cooren's (2009: 6) identification of authority with power is also visible in their reference to Hobbes' and Machiavelli's works as scholarship on authority, a topic that both philosophers have in fact notoriously neglected, focussing instead on power.

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ARTICLE

Authority, conformity and obedience: Applying Friedrich's theory of authority to the classics

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Abstract

In the conformity and obedience studies of Asch and Milgram, legitimate authority is defined as a form of power to which subjects submit irrationally. This view assumes a causative process which the subjects' behaviour is said to manifest. Furthermore, this view assumes that there is illegitimate (or malevolent) authority. Carl J. Friedrich's theory of authority as reasoned elaboration offers an alternative perspective, which reveals conceptual differences between authority and such related constructs as power and legitimacy. When these concepts are properly distinguished, a re-interpretation of the classical studies of conformity and obedience is called forth. Such an exercise produces insights into some of the discipline's most controversial, if not disturbing, results. Specifically, it leads to an understanding of laboratory conformity and obedience in rational terms.

KEYWORDS

authority, conformity, legitimacy, obedience, power

BACKGROUND

The conceptual analysis of authority and the related concepts of power and legitimacy is a task with which scholars have wrestled from ancient times to the last quarter of the twentieth century. In social psychology, such attention is unsurprising because few issues are more crucial than understanding why people obey orders, agree to perform tasks and accept communications. However, according to Herbst (2006, p. 285), the theoretical study of authority has become 'oddly unfashionable' since the mid-1970s and the start of what Elms (2009, p. 35) calls the 'Dark Age' of obedience research. Several pressing questions have still to receive convincing answers; for instance, no persuasive explanation for the behaviour of the subjects of Milgram's (1974) obedience studies is available today (Reicher & Haslam, 2017, p. 123).

While authors have explained the decline of obedience studies by calling on ethical concerns (Reicher & Haslam, 2017), Herbst (2006) attributes the neglect of authority as a research theme to its identification with power, from which 'authoritarian' has evolved. A brief survey of textbooks in social psychology vindicates Herbst's analysis. Indeed, this review reveals that such authors as Deaux and Snyder (2019), Hewstone et al. (2012), and Taylor et al. (2003) associate authority either with the authoritarian personality as conceived by Adorno et al. (1950), or link it to the obedience studies of Milgram (1974). In that latter case, authors typically define authority as legitimate authority (Myers, 2014) or legitimate power (Vaughan & Hogg, 2018). For example, for Gilovitch et al. (2019, p. 428) 'Authority is power that derives from institutionalised roles or arrangements.'

Among social psychologists, discussions of authority, power and legitimacy provide evidence of widespread disagreement and conceptual confusion. This is owed, in part, to the tendency of many psychologists to commence their analyses with the broad concept of power and derive the concept of authority from it (e.g. French, 1956; French & Raven, 1959; Raven & French, 1958a, 1958b). Relatedly, Cartwright (1959, p. 184) argues that social psychologists' tendency to define power to include several forms of social influence reduced their reluctance to employ it in their analyses of social interaction, mainly because influence is a more benign concept than power. However, the substitution of the broad notion of influence for that of power blurs differences between them and such related concepts as control, domination, legitimacy and authority.

Cartwright's observation confirms the apparent arbitrary basis on which some theorists chose their terminology. For example, a stance frequently adopted in the literature is to consider occasions on which people change their behaviour as cases in which a single type of factor is operating and to hold that it is of little importance whether this factor is called power, influence, authority, obedience, conformity or social pressure (Spillane & Martin, 2018). Although such an approach is understandable (it is notably dictated by the necessity to base a study on some observable change), it has come at the expense of conceptual precision.

For a time, it seemed that progress was being made, especially in research on conformity and obedience. However, the seminal studies of Asch and Milgram attracted widespread criticism from experimental and ethical perspectives (Gibson et al., 2018; Griggs, 2017; Griggs et al., 2020; Haslam & Reicher, 2017; Hodges & Geyer, 2006; Jetten & Hornsey, 2011, 2012; Miller, 1986, 2009; Passini & Morselli, 2009; Reicher & Haslam, 2017; Smith & Haslam, 2017). Whatever the merits (or demerits) of these early studies, the nature and source of authority remains a confused field of study (Herbst, 2006; Kiechel, 2012). Specifically, no progress has been achieved concerning the question of what encourages subjects in experimental environments to 'accept' authority by obeying directives, endorsing actions or believing communications.

This article begins with a conceptual analysis of authority which seeks criteria for making reliable distinctions between authority, power and legitimacy. The work of Carl J. Friedrich (1958, 1963) has been chosen to demonstrate the crucial role of reason in authority. Concisely, when good reasons exist for doing or believing something, such action or thought acquires a quality which is 'authoritative.' Friedrich's theory of authority is then applied to a reinterpretation of the classical studies of conformity and obedience, since one would expect to see authority exemplified in the relationship between experimenters and subjects in laboratory settings. This re-evaluation reveals that subjects did not behave irrationally but responded reasonably to the contrived circumstances in which they found themselves. The conclusion summarizes the overall argument and highlights the general relevance of Friedrich's conception.

AUTHORITY AS REASONED ELABORATION

Carl Friedrich's theory of authority (Friedrich, 1958, 1963), overlooked by social psychologists, has recently been revived by Herbst (2006), Joullié et al. (2021), Plant (2011) and Spillane and Joullié (2015).

These authors argue that Friedrich's theory has the potential to resolve salient conceptual confusions and problems associated with the empirical study of authority.

'Authority' derives from the Greek concept *arché*, which in Homer signifies 'initiative' which 'gets things done' (Myres, 1968, p. 145). Such initiative resides in persons who are in some way qualified to initiate social or political action. The translation of *arché* to Latin confirmed the conceptual link with initiative: *auctor* and *auctoritas* refer to inventing or initiating action in the sphere of opinion or command. Friedrich (1963, p. 219) maintains that *auctoritas* is related to 'augmentation': it 'supplements a mere act of will by adding reasons to it.' It is advice which cannot be properly disregarded, such as a doctor gives to a patient. It is a matter of adding wisdom to will, reason to interests. The role of reasoning in authority relationships is the central issue. Indeed, when good reasons exist for believing and doing something, such action or thought acquires a quality which is 'authoritative.' Etymologically, there is also a link to 'author,' since the term refers to an individual who creates and disseminates knowledge. Unless one is ready to engage in solipsism, one cannot be an author alone.

Friedrich (1963, p. 224) summarizes his view in defining authority as 'the quality of a communication which is capable of reasoned elaboration.' Friedrich is adamant that reasoning involves arguing validly about relevant issues. However, not everyone will consider an authoritative communication reasonable since arguments are not always convincing. Friedrich's theory thus merely states that authoritative communications are judged to be capable of reasoned elaboration, which underlines the dynamic nature of authority and of the power that is derived from it. Individuals can lose their authority-based power when their reasoning is no longer in accord with the interests, beliefs and values of the community. Such situations led Friedrich (1963, p. 226) to extend his definition of authority to include communal reasoned elaboration, which acknowledges the interests, beliefs and values of the community within which the authority operates.

Friedrich's (1963, pp. 226–227) analysis allows him to talk of both power and authority in terms of obedience while retaining a distinction between them. Indeed, an emphasis on reasoned elaboration in authority relationships implies that individuals can lack or lose authority yet retain some power. As such, people who have 'lost their authority' have in fact lost the component of their power that stemmed from their communications, but not from their position in the power structure. Specifically, the authority of their communications has weakened because the community with which they engage has changed and their capacity for communal reasoning has declined. For example, throughout 2021, President Trump retained the power of his position. However, his communications about the Covid-19 pandemic came to be ignored by a substantial part of the American public, because they regularly went against reports from federal agencies. In contrast, the addresses of the White House's chief medical adviser, Dr. Fauci, received careful attention. On medical matters and in the eyes of a sceptical audience, President Trump lost authority to Dr. Fauci.

Friedrich is critical of scholars who equate authority and legitimacy since such authors miss the central aspect of authority, namely its relation to reason. Legitimacy implies 'reasoning upon the title to rule' (Friedrich, 1963, p. 236) and authority creates legitimacy wherever it provides good reasons for the right to rule. As such, whereas the respect of agreed procedures often suffices to establish legitimacy (President Trump derived the legitimacy of his tenure because he was lawfully elected), authority further legitimates power by the fact that the capacity to issue communications, with an appropriate convincing rationale, embraces the right to rule. However, authority is not 'legitimate power' for legitimate power exists in multiple forms without a capacity for reasoned elaboration. In this sense, for Friedrich the notion of 'legitimate authority', widely employed by social psychologists, is pleonastic.

Friedrich laments that the true nature of authority (as authoritativeness) has been obscured by the pejorative term 'authoritarian' which refers to people who pretend to act authoritatively while rejecting reasoned elaboration in favour of directives and commandments. When considered in Friedrich's sense, authority is thus quite distinct from the use of power and coercion that is ordinarily implied in the notion of 'authoritarian'. An authoritarian is a person who orders rather than argues, directs rather than advises, commands rather than suggests.

By conceiving it as a quality of knowledge, Friedrich's analysis broadens the notion of authority. Considered in his way, authority approaches the notion of 'correctness' communicated to others. In this sense, authority is of two kinds, scientific and moral. Thus, in seeking out the 'authorities' on a scientific matter, one would be searching for the most reliable and effective knowledge for bringing about some specifiable aim. Alternatively, to seek out the 'authorities' on moral questions is to search for the best form of knowledge on which to discriminate between acceptable and unacceptable aims or means. However, if authority is to include the range of values which influence human behaviour, then it becomes so vague as to be empirically inaccessible.

Friedrich's definition can be expanded without loss of meaning as follows: Authority is represented by *those social relationships in which a qualified person (or persons) initiates social action which is voluntarily acknowledged and accepted by others.* Accordingly, individuals obtain qualifications to initiate social action through reasoned elaboration in two ways: occupancy of a formal office, and personal, technical expertise (Spillane & Spillane, 1999). When the two components of authority are perceived to exist in the one person, such as a university professor who acts as an experimenter in a research programme in his field of expertise, people often accept directives beyond normal expectations and limits. As Barnard (1938, p. 174) noted, in such situations, 'The confidence engendered may even make compliance an inducement in itself.'

Authority of office, often called positional or formal authority, is based on the right for there to exist offices and positions which accrue prescribed powers and entitlements. For example, subjects in psychological experiments perceive authority figures as socially endorsed to administer the proceedings but have no other grounds for believing in their authority. This form of authority entails a body of knowledge of a non-technical character, generally called administrative knowledge, which includes information about rules, roles, policy decisions and procedures. Authority of office is often associated with the 'bureaucrat' or unqualified official in, say, a hospital who has little knowledge of the technical side of medicine and nursing. It also applies to an experimenter in a group experiment who is perceived to lack relevant technical expertise. Occupation of office tends to encourage organizational members to retain authority figures in their posts. According to Raven and French (1958a, p. 408), 'the very occupancy of a key position in a structure lends legitimacy to the occupant.' Indeed, formal authority figures come to be accepted as part of the status quo and this explains, at least in part, the accrual (even extension) of powers that accompany such positions.

Authority of knowledge accrues to certain individuals who demonstrate technical knowledge or skills that provide the basis for conceding certain rights to them. It is often referred to as informal, technical or personal authority and allows distinctions to be drawn between technical expertise and personal appeal. Although this category emphasizes knowledge as the fundamental criterion, it leaves open the possibility that personal qualities take over other considerations.

An enduring merit of Friedrich's theory of authority is that it eschews the conflation of authority, power and legitimacy. For example, 'authority figures' in Friedrichs's sense are characterized by their possession of special qualifications, represented by the possession of symbolic objects which designate a particular status in a social relationship. More often, however, such status is related to people's special abilities of which they are conscious and of which others become aware by their actions. In either case, the role of reasoning in the interactions and exchanges between the 'authority figures' and those around them remains central. This role is exemplified in the communications between qualified experts who act as experimenters in research laboratories and their subjects.

AUTHORITY AND LABORATORY CONFORMITY

Conformity, or yielding in laboratory settings, is rarely discussed in terms of authority. This omission is surprising because at least one interpretation of yielding directly involves this concept. Indeed, conformity is widely regarded as a change in behaviour caused by 'group pressure'. Accordingly, a general theme in conformity studies is the implication of a suspension of rational processes. Although such a view has been recently challenged, it still represents the mainstream account. One of its influential

advocates was Moscovici (1985, p. 349), who wrote: 'The Asch studies are one of the most dramatic il-lustrations of conformity, of blindly going along with the group, even when the individual realises that by doing so, he turns his back on reality and truth.'

Late nineteenth-century sociologists Tarde and Le Bon were among the first to argue that group in-fluence occurred independently of reason (Borch, 2006). Their arguments reflected the then prevalent Darwinian emphasis on unknown mechanistic factors controlling behaviour. Drawing on analyses of common social phenomena, Tarde and Le Bon notably pointed to the blind and irrational effects of group influence. Their view has survived in laboratory studies of conformity in small groups. Another view of social influence is Duncker's (1938), who argued that individuals are influenced by 'prestige sug-gestion.' Duncker's conception has been often combined with that of Deutsch and Gerard (1955), who argued that conformity in the laboratory is conformity to the group. In their view, such a process occurs largely independent of cognition and manifests what they called 'normative social influence,' defined as 'influence to conform with the positive expectations of another' (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955, p. 629). In their analysis, a significant feature of the normative social influence process is that it leads individuals to agree with a group judgement while remaining privately unconvinced. This process has also been called 'compliance' (Jahoda, 1959; Kelman, 1958).

Whether the conformity observed in the Asch-type experiments can be explained by the notion of authoritative direction remains an unsettled question. The presence of normative social influence is an inference which derives from the procedures that encouraged 'cooperation' in the group. However, findings are open to an alternative interpretation, namely that subjects complied with the wishes of the experimenter (Mori & Arai, 2010). Asch (1955, p. 33) himself reported that some of his participants went along with the group because they did not want to 'spoil' the results of the experiment. In this case, conformity is to the experimenter, not to the group.

Asch's experimental programme was based on Gestalt field principles which were given their most explicit formulation by Kurt Lewin (1951). In Lewin's theory, the dynamic elements are forces which move individuals about. It is thus unsurprising that Asch's commentators have generally interpreted his results in terms of yielding to social pressure, a form of expression that not only indicates a causative explanation but happens to accord with a metaphorical usage of these terms in everyday language (Rock, 1990).

The mainstream, causative interpretation of Asch's studies has recently been questioned on two accounts. First, against Tarde and Le Bon, Spears (2010) argues that groups regularly display more rationality and less bias than individuals do. As such, going with the group in perplexing situations is rational behaviour, whereas ignoring it would be irrational (a point made in Asch, 1952, p. 494). Second, Jetten and Hornsey (2012) note that if Asch's research reports provide apparent evidence for irrationality on the part of the subjects, they also contain abundant evidence for their rationality. For example, when asked why they conformed, subjects reported that they did not want to appear foolish or isolated. Others thought that the first person to speak had a visual impairment and assumed that those who spoke after him did not want to come across as impolite: they thus decided to follow suit. Furthermore, if most of Asch's subjects conformed at least once, about a quarter never did. If there is evidence for conformity, there is also clear evidence for deliberate resistance.

It should be emphasized that Asch was himself cautious in his explanations. Although he relied on such expressions as 'pull', 'group pressure' and 'social pressure' in his accounts, he did not claim that his results were explained adequately by these constructs (Spillane & Martin, 2018, p. 215). His restraint was presumably based on the finding that increasing the majority size does not increase the yielding effect monotonically. Specifically, Asch found that beyond four, further increases in the majority have no effect on the responses, which is not what one expects if pressure is to be measured by the number of contrary opinions encountered. Yet, the mechanical model of conformity has prevailed throughout much of the literature. It pictures individuals as a system of needs and regards social interaction as directed towards satisfying those needs (e.g. Homans, 1961). For example, Walker and Heynes (1962, p. 16) stated: 'If one wishes to produce conformity it is only necessary to arouse a need or motive, prof-fer a goal which satisfies that need and make conformity necessary to the achievement of that goal.' As

Silverman (1971) noted, accounts advanced on Walker and Heynes' lines exclude subjects' apprehension of the situation. In this way, any counter-intuitive psychological phenomenon is a candidate for an 'explanation' in terms 'social pressure' and a 'need to conform.'

In standard conformity experiments, the subjects' perception of the task is deliberately restricted by the experimenter. Crucial features are concealed from the subjects so that it is almost impossible for them to make correct inferences about the true state-of-affairs. That is, the subjects' perceptions are carefully structured by the experimenter. If the subjects knew that others (including the experimenter) were conspiring against them, it is doubtful whether a language of 'forces,' 'social pressure' or 'blind conformity' could be justified to account for their behaviour. In other words, it is the deception applied to the subjects that constitutes the baseline for interpretation of the results in terms of 'forces' or 'pressures' and allows the experimenters to ignore the possibility that subjects are acting on their own evaluation of the situation. As Spillane and Martin (2018, p. 216) concluded: 'The necessity for deception makes the "scientific" explanation [in mechanistic and deterministic terms] seem very contrived'.

An alternative explanation is to be found among researchers who argue that the Asch-type studies are not concerned with social pressure but with a cognitive operation. Accordingly, subjects conform because they believe others (posing as subjects like themselves) are competent (London & Lim, 1964). For example, Jones et al. (1958, p. 211) reported that 'subjects tended to yield only when they thought the group was correct'. However, if social pressure is operating here, it requires qualification. Specifically, there is little doubt that subjects are directly influenced by the group in that they believe the group to be correct and conform with it. Conformity also occurs because of indirect influence. That is, subjects respond to a psychological process and conform because they focus on the effect of their responses, rather than on their content (Jones & Jones, 1964). This focus on the effect of action is used to account for the lower level of yielding in the experiment conducted by Deutsch and Gerard (1955), where subjects were partitioned from each other (in contrast with Asch, 1951).

In summary, several studies in conformity point to the conclusion that social psychologists need to move towards some theory of the person as a rational, role-playing agent to account for conformity (Jetten & Hornsey, 2012; Mori & Arai, 2010; Spears, 2010). To modify one's judgement in response to people who are equally authoritative on a topic is a reasonable form of activity. Combined with the influence of the experimenter, explanations based on informational exchange and judgement appear to be relevant, if not sufficient.

AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE

As noted, occupancy of office lends legitimacy to occupants, and this legitimacy enables them to extend their powers. Poignant examples come from research on experimental demand where the power of formal authority has been graphically demonstrated. An early example is Landis (1924) who, during a study of emotional reactions, subjected students to 17 different emotion-arousing situations. Task 15 was to behead a live rat with a butcher's knife. Fifteen of the 21 subjects obliged, after what was described as 'more or less urging'. In five cases where the subjects could not be persuaded to follow directions, the experimenter decapitated the rat while the subjects looked on. Even if public regard for animal welfare has changed over the recent decades (Hagen et al., 2011), chopping a live rat's head was presumably as unpleasant in the 1920s as it is now. Landis' experiment is thus a precursor of studies in which participants are requested to perform ethically debatable tasks, including the doing of harm.

Verba (1966, p. 272) argued that students of group dynamics pay insufficient attention to the fact that there is an authority figure in leaderless experimental groups—the experimenter—who is usually older and of high status. By entering the experimental environment, group members expect directives and accept them as legitimate. Consequently, experimental subjects follow the directives of the experimenter with few complaints or little resistance (Hodges & Geyer, 2006; Hollander & Turowetz, 2017). For example, Frank (1944) showed that when students agreed to be subjects in an experiment, they

automatically gave such power to experimenters that they (the experimenters) could not get subjects to resist their efforts to have them perform disagreeable tasks.

A wide variety of social psychological studies support Frank's thesis. Examples come from the studies of demand characteristics of the experiment (Orne, 1962), experimenter bias effects (Rosenthal, 1963), and from diverse examples of compliant behaviour in experimental settings—from masturbation (Masters & Johnson, 1966), starvation (Rowland, 1968), and studies which stress the unreasonableness or even apparent danger of the experimental task (Orne, 1962b; Orne & Evans, 1965). Another telling example of compliant behaviour is Orne (1962a). Presenting subjects with approximately 2000 pages of random numbers and instructing them to sum adjacent numbers and continue until his return, Orne found almost no one who was willing to relinquish the absurd task, even after five hours. Orne extended the unreasonableness of the task by asking subjects to tear up completed pages, cut them in exactly 32 pieces and dispose of them in a waste-paper basket. These additional steps in pointlessness had little effect on subjects' persistence. Indeed, when asked by the experimenter why they persevered with such an obviously meaningless task, subjects responded that they believed the experiment to be a test of their persistence.

Findings such as Orne's support Verba's (1966) argument that the experimenter acts as an authority figure in supposedly leaderless experimental settings. Specifically, they point to the degree of overt behavioural control which experimenters can exercise in the laboratory. Such control is well demonstrated in the famous studies of obedience to authority reported by Milgram (1963, 1965a, 1965b) and summarized in Milgram (1974). When interviewed after Milgram's experiments, subjects invariably gave as the rationale for their actions the statement that they were an integral part of a 'scientific investigation' and were determined to fulfil their commitment to the study despite having to incur some discomfort (Haslam et al., 2014; Hollander & Turowetz, 2017). Some subjects provided several reasons for continuation, including trust in experimenters and their institution (Hollander & Turowetz, 2017). When conducted in the name of a noble cause with which they identify, the cooperation of subjects with an experimenter (such as demonstrated in Milgram's studies) has recently been analysed as one of 'engaged followership' (Haslam & Reicher, 2017, 2018; Haslam et al., 2015).

Mixon (1972) emphasized the role of the contextual influences on Milgram's findings. As Orne and Evans (1965) reported, subjects interviewed after the experiment stated that the imprimatur of the scientist acted as sufficient justification and protection to enable them to obey the experimenter's requests. The extent to which the prestige of science acted as a justification is illustrated in one of the variants of the experiment, reported in Milgram (1974, pp. 68–69). When the study was conducted within a nondescript building in Bridgeport, an industrial city close to Newhaven (where Yale is located), obedience rates dropped from 65% to 48%. More generally, although subjects reported strong emotional reactions to the repugnant activities, they were convinced that they would not inflict harm because the context was an experimental one. 'All subjects appeared to assume that some form of safety precautions had been taken during the experiment' (Orne & Evans, 1965, p. 199).

Mixon's (1972) comments point to a need for caution in the interpretation of the Milgram obedience studies. One common view is to see Milgram's experiments as epitomizing not only an ill-considered and dangerous subservience to formal authority but also man's inhumanity to man. As Milgram (1965a, p. 75) himself stated: 'The kind of character produced in American society cannot be counted on to insulate its citizens from brutality and inhumane treatment at the direction of malevolent authority.' Milgram went on to argue that a substantial proportion of people do what they are told 'so long as they perceive that the command comes from a legitimate authority.'

Commenting on Milgram's studies, Spillane and Martin (2018, p. 219) raise a double-barrelled question: did the subjects view the experimenter as a malevolent authority, and is their obedience to him owed to the fact that what the studies' protocols require subjects to do permit expression of their covert aggression? A careful examination of the situation of subjects in the Milgram experiment reveals that the answer to the first question is negative. Indeed, the experimenter clearly and repeatedly states that 'no tissue damage will result from the shocks', which are 'not dangerous'. Combined with the legitimate status of scientific investigators, this constitutes a strong claim for the experimenter to be regarded as a

non-malevolent authority and the subsequent administration of shocks to serve the cause of 'learning' is consistent with this claim (Haslam & Reicher, 2017). The status of Milgram's subjects is thus better compared to that of nurses who, under instruction, engage in activities that hurt patients, but which do not imply malevolent intent. The conclusion that Milgram's results can be generalized to cover cases of people obeying authority viewed as malevolent appears, therefore, vacuous.

An early challenge to Milgram's interpretation was mounted by Mixon (1972, 1989). Mixon found that the subjects were faced with cues and definitions of the situation which favoured the conclusion that the 'victims' were not likely to be harmed. To support his analysis, Mixon conducted a mock-up version of the Milgram experiment in which subjects were told that the shocks were not real but agreed to pretend that they were. Subjects' emotional reactions and rates of obedience matched well with Milgram's results. Mixon concluded that experimental subjects construe their situation as governed by rules compatible with the rational (non-malevolent) authority code of the day.

Orne and Evans' (1965) findings that experimental subjects comply with the experimenter's request to inflict possible injury to themselves further weaken Milgram's interpretations of his results. Another challenge to Milgram's interpretation is Martin et al. (1976). In this study, the researchers designed a similar experiment to Milgram (1963), except that the only possible sufferers from the subjects' readiness to obey the experimenter were the subjects themselves. The study was designed to create a set of conditions in which subjects were led to perceive themselves as being asked to run a considerable risk of lasting personal injury (hearing damage in this instance).

The pretext used by Martin et al. (1976) to justify asking subjects to risk permanent injury was the need to identify certain people in the general population who possessed a recently discovered ability to hear ultra-high-frequency sounds. Subjects were told that such knowledge would assist in research into ways of enabling blind people to 'see' with the aid of electronic devices attached to the ear. The subjects were 42 male secondary school pupils. A feature of this experiment was that the voluntary nature of participating was stressed several times. Unlike the Milgram procedure, there was no prompting by the experimenter to continue the experiment when subjects showed signs of faltering. Furthermore, the condition of the experiment precluded the introduction of the cries of pain and pleas to desist on the part of the victim which were so dramatic a feature of Milgram's procedure.

Martin et al.'s study produced similar results to the Milgram's study. Responses to the post-test questionnaire showed that the subjects felt under no obligation to risk personal injury but experienced a strong element of curiosity about the study. Very few admitted to any doubts about the genuineness of the experimenter's explanations and a substantial number expressed trust in his authority. Martin et al. (1976, p. 353) concluded that 'the close similarity between our results and those obtained in the Milgram situation suggests that there is no necessity to postulate any explanation involving aggression towards the helpless victim in the latter.' Commenting on the argument raised apropos Milgram's results that the subjects enjoyed the situation in which they were placed because it allowed them to express covert aggression, Martin et al. argued that if this is the true explanation, the subjects should see authority as by nature malevolent since it legitimizes the expression of their own malevolence. It would then be expected that the subjects should not only support the commands of the experimenter as an authority figure but should show signs of tension release. The evidence provides no support for this view; rather, the opposite seems to have been the case since manifest signs of increasing tension were observed among Milgram's subjects. As Martin et al. (1976, p. 354) noted, 'Our results carry the objections to this interpretation even further, since to explain them in similar terms would necessitate postulating aggression against the self at the behest of an authority figure.'

Martin et al.'s (1976) study has attracted little comment. An exception is Miller (1986, pp. 78–81) who dismissed it as a critique of Milgram's studies on the grounds that Milgram measured obedience while Martin et al. assessed compliance. However, Miller did not think it necessary to explicate the difference between compliance and obedience. Furthermore, Miller (1986, p. 81) commented: 'The pressure – the agonising conflict between an authority's commands and the subject's personal desires – seems missing [from the Martin et al. study].' This comment begs the question at issue: did Milgram's subjects respond to 'pressure', and did they experience agonizing conflict? The standard textbook presentation

of the Milgram studies answers in the positive (Griggs, 2017; Griggs et al., 2020). Other scholars have answered in the negative (Gibson, 2014; Haslam et al., 2014; Hollander & Turowetz, 2017). The present authors concur with the latter view. The reasons for such opining are worth exposing; they hinge on conceptual distinctions between power, authority and legitimacy, distinctions that neither Milgram nor Miller made.

For Milgram, 'authority means the person who is perceived to be in a position of social control within a given situation' (1974, p. 138). This definition, apart from being phenomenological, conflates authority with control and power. To operationalize 'authority', Milgram added verbal prods which are delivered as (allegedly) malevolent commands. The ensuing 'obedience to authority' enabled Milgram to talk of 'forces' which impinge upon individuals and change their behaviour in undesirable directions. For example, Milgram (1974, p. 143) stated that 'An authority system, then, consists of a minimum of two persons sharing the expectation that one of them has the right to prescribe behavior for the other.' He continued: 'There is general agreement not only that [the experimenter] can influence behavior but that he *ought* to be able to.' One of these 'forces' is, in his account, an illegitimate or malevolent 'authority.' Moving from 'influence' to 'power', Milgram concluded that the experimenter's power is based on the consent of subjects. He referred to this power as legitimate authority with the consequence that he can talk of illegitimate (or malevolent) authority as the second 'force' operating on amenable subjects.

Commentators on Milgram's work almost invariably follow his tendency to confuse authority and legitimacy. For example, Kaposi (2017, p. 393) states that if the experimenter is the *originator* of the proceedings, 'then by definition he turns from being the legitimate authority of science into a criminally destructive (and, arguably, an illegitimate) authority'. Another way of saying this (in Friedrich's sense) is to acknowledge that, at the beginning of the proceedings, the experimenter's communications are perceived by subjects as authoritative but as the experiment developed, he was perceived as authoritarian. But this begs the question as to how exactly the experimenter was perceived.

Miller (1986) acknowledged that the Martin et al.'s study challenges Milgram's assertion that his experiment exposed subjects to 'malevolent authority'. However, Miller argued that, unlike Martin et al., Milgram deliberately used such verbal prods as 'you must go on' to fit with his view of authority. The prods were supposed to turn authority into a malevolent form, or what Friedrich (1963) calls 'false authority', which occurs when people in positions of power issue communications which are believed to allow for reasoned elaboration when in fact they do not. Yet, the experimenter in the obedience studies did engage in reasoned elaboration to establish the bona fides of the experiment (Gibson, 2014, 2019). Miller's assertion that the prods both operationalize (malevolent) authority and prove the existence of obedience to orders (rather than voluntary compliance to rules and norms) is thus circular.

That Milgram conflates power and authority is evidenced by Miller's statement that the former was influenced by the 'impressive' analysis of social power by French and Raven (1959). According to Miller (1986, p. 15), French and Raven 'conceptualised authority (sic) into various dimensions, such as legitimacy, reward power, coercive power, expert power, and so on'. The confusion could hardly be clearer: authority is to be represented by different forms of power. Milgram's conceptual analysis here leads to the conclusion that coercive power is consistent with its authorization. People under torture are obviously reacting to coercion but it cannot seriously be maintained that they are authorizing it. If they did so, the term 'coercion' would not apply.

The conceptual muddle in which Milgram and Miller are engaged is further revealed in their acceptance and interpretation of French and Raven's influential but flawed division of power. For example, French and Raven's five categories are not independent as reward and coercive power do not depend on the consent of subordinates, whereas legitimate, expert and referent power do. For this reason, some theorists, such as Day (1963), divide the categories into 'power' (coercive and reward) and 'authority' (referent, expert and legitimate).

French and Raven also confuse 'legitimate' and 'legal'. As such, their definition of legitimate power needs to be qualified to emphasize its normative base. As it stands, their definition allows 'right' to be considered both in an inclusive sense and within a more specific legalistic framework. To avoid confusion, French and Raven should have used 'legal power'. Their conceptual confusion has resulted in many

theorists after them defining authority either as legitimate or formal power, in either case implying that referent and expert power are somehow of a different order to authority. The differences in behaviour arising from the effect of legal power as against referent and expert power (as categorized by French and Raven) are thus assumed to be objectively discernible. This distinction is contrary to the phenomenological use of 'legitimate'.

Gibson (2013, 2014, 2019) and Gibson et al. (2018) analysed exchanges between the experimenter and subjects in the Milgram obedience studies and argued that the experiments are not demonstrations of obedience to authority but an exercise in persuasion and rhetorical skill. Examination of the Milgram tapes held in the archives at Yale University show that the subjects often argued with the experimenter and, in several cases, won the argument. Defiant subjects were able to mobilize their arguments and draw the experimental session to a close. As Gibson (2014, p. 434) notes, in these cases, 'the participants are not so much disobeying as engaging the experimenter in rational debate.' For Gibson, that some subjects mobilized arguments for ending the session well before the experimenter resorted to directives demonstrates that the Milgram studies were not about obedience to authoritarian commands, or to orders as conventionally understood (a view shared by Burger et al., 2011 and Haslam et al., 2014 & Haslam et al., 2015). Rather than studies of obedience, the experimenters look more like tests of (the experimenters') rhetorical skill. In a 2019 article, Gibson further noted that obedience is generally defined by social psychologists as behaviour change produced by the commands of authority figures, a feature absent in the Milgram studies.

Miller (2009, p. 25) described the Milgram's verbal prods as 'one of the most important features of the obedience paradigm' because they allegedly operationalize authority. But do they? Gibson (2019) argued that if Milgram's verbal prods operationalize anything, it is persuasion. Furthermore, Gibson (2019, p. 246) noted that several studies have drawn attention to 'the levels of subject resistance and argumentation in the experiments', which indicates that the interactions between experimenter and subjects were authoritative. Indeed, it is a conspicuous feature of the interactions that subjects were prepared to argue with the experimenter about his verbal prods and the general logic associated thereto. Such exchanges establish their relationship as one of reasoned elaboration and thus authoritative in Friedrich's sense. Such an interpretation of the experiments eliminates the conventional view that subjects surrendered their powers of reasoning to a malevolent figure in a white coat and performed inhumane acts, as Milgram argues and as generations of textbook writers have accepted.

Milgram, Hollander (2015), Hollander and Maynard (2016) and Hollander and Turowetz (2017) studied experimenter–subject interaction through post-experiment interviews. They concluded that it is unlikely that Milgram's results can be explained by a single psychological process, such as 'obedience to authority', 'agentic state' (Milgram) or 'engaged followership' (Haslam & Reicher, 2017, 2018). However, the authors neither attempted to analyse Milgram's dubious definition of authority, nor did they question the popular but erroneous notion of authority as legitimate power.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Understandably, much of the attention in the Asch and Milgram studies is directed at the subjects' behaviour—judgements in the Asch studies and action in Milgram's. These behaviours are then embedded in relationships of conformity and obedience respectively. However, as this article has shown, authority is a more suitable embedding of the behaviour exhibited in Asch's and Milgram's studies.

The role and behaviour of the experimenter is central to the outcome of laboratory studies. Asch (1956) described the role of the experimenter as that of an 'impartial chairman' who opens the meeting with brief comments about the purpose of the experiment and makes it clear that it is a test of the subject's ability. Milgram's experimenter gave a longer introduction which emphasized the importance of psychologists and their theories about learning. In the Milgram case, the experimenter needed to communicate and demonstrate potentially distressing information which is subsequently downplayed with assurances that no permanent damage will result from the actions of the subjects.

In their mainstream interpretation, the Asch and Milgram studies demonstrate that most people permit a group or experimenter to impose upon them a definition of reality which is different from their own. However, this orthodox account offers no rational explanation for such a phenomenon. It has encouraged researchers to employ a language of forces, social pressure, conformity and obedience to (malevolent or illegitimate) 'authority', or what Fromm (1947) calls 'irrational authority'. Rational authority is based on competence and requires constant scrutiny and criticism. Irrational authority is always power over people where criticism is forbidden (Fromm, 1947, p. 19). In Fromm's analysis, obedience to directives is a possible outcome of either rational or irrational authority. If his analysis is accepted, authority-related concepts manifest one or other component of the dichotomy. On the one hand, theorists concentrating on irrational authority emphasize such notions as power, domination, coercion, control, force and obedience. This tendency is explicit in Milgram's studies. On the other hand, theorists focusing on rational authority invoke notions of respect, prestige, competence and expertise; their analysis is consistent with Friedrich's theory of authority and that of those psychologists who interpret subjects in the laboratory as rational, role-playing agents (Darroch & Steiner, 1970; Greenberg, 1967).

Friedrich (1963) criticized Fromm's 'irrational authority' as false authority and regarded it as an oxymoron. Specifically, Friedrich argued that while there are greater or lesser degrees of reasoning involved in authority relationships, the authoritative communication remains that which can reasonably be elaborated. Thus, attempts to identify authority with the irrational miss the fundamental point that authority is, by definition, related to reason.

Experimenters who engage in reasoned elaboration, including those in the Asch and Milgram studies, frequently find that their reasons are challenged by their subjects who offer alternative reasons for experimental practices. Thus, a process of argumentation is entered into as both parties offer reasons to support their contrasting views. However, if argument is forbidden at the outset, it is difficult to conceive of authority as anything more than rationalized, rather than rational, communication. Furthermore, since authority is reflected in cooperative exchanges between experimenters and subjects, it requires a language which emphasizes clear description and valid reasoning which culminates in authoritative advice. Such language assumes the ability to persuade subjects of the right course of action. What makes a specific course of action authoritative is that convincing reasons are at times meta-rational in the sense that they refer to transcendental beliefs. As it is unreasonable to deny such beliefs evidential value, authoritative reasoning and persuasive skills constitute the field of authority rather than the more limited field of logic (Friedrich, 1963; Gibson, 2019). Persuasive skills provide experimenters with strategies to protect them (and their authority) since they deal with accepted ideas and probable opinions rather than logical proofs.

Subjects in the Milgram studies were not always convinced by the experimenter's reasoned elaboration. Friedrich acknowledged that arguments do not always convince, even when employed by people with considerable technical expertise or who represent a prestigious institution. Accordingly, he related authoritative communications to the interests, beliefs and values of the community at a particular period. His construct of 'communal reasoned elaboration' assists in explaining the dilemmas presented to subjects in the Milgram study. Indeed, the interests, beliefs and values of the community could hardly be expected to coincide with the task Milgram set for his subjects. In fact, such a misalignment (and the subjects' response to it) was the very point of the study. Furthermore, the study mobilized the community's view of an admired university (Yale), research for humanitarian purposes (learning) and the exemplary role of experimenters as agents of both. For the experimenters to lose their authority (in Friedrich's sense), they would have had to lose their power to direct the experiment because the authority of their communications had disintegrated and their capacity for communal reasoning had, therefore, declined. There is no evidence that such a disintegration and decline occurred during or after the experiments.

The experimenter in the Asch study had an easier task since the experiment was presented as a test of *ability*. If it is accepted that subjects in laboratory experiments, when under observation, approach their task as a test of their abilities, most of the problems in the interpretation of the

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experimental results disappear. In the Asch and Milgram studies the situations are deliberately contrived to obscure clues about what ability is being tested by allowing two conflicting criteria for performance to be equally prominent. The subjects who want to perform well are presented with alternative judgements (Asch) or actions (Milgram). It is reasonable to assume that they wonder what is expected of them and this assumption is supported by their questioning of and seeking further advice from the experimenter. Since they believe some ability is being tested, any feedback they receive will be crucial to further performance. Consequently, the feedback must either be nil or conflicting if the in-built ambiguity of the experiment is to be preserved. It is unsurprising, therefore, that most subjects select from each alternative available to them to satisfy the experimenter and themselves. This situation would not arise if experimenters informed their subjects about the specific ability to be tested. This move, however, would convert all experiments into tests, so that the information gained would be about what subjects *can* do and not what they *will* do (Spillane & Martin, 2018, p. 231).

It is a function of authority to give reasons to support actions where the steps to a goal entail a cost. Experience shows that individuals will act in accord with this view of authority, even when they are threatened with pain or deprivation, provided they accept that they are furthering the desirable purpose claimed by the authority (Spillane & Martin, 2018). The experimental literature on conformity and obedience has shown that subjects can readily be deceived by misleading statements concerning the purpose of the experiment, or by false claims that certain steps are necessary for its fulfilment. In the case of Milgram's study, there is no evidence to show that authority would be conceded if either the experimenter's declared goal was judged to be malevolent, or the claim that the specified steps are necessary for its achievement were shown to be false.

The results of the Milgram (1974) and Martin et al. (1976) studies resemble those of several researchers in social psychology and invoke the idea of Allport's (1934) hypothesis of the J-curve of institutional conformity. Allport provided similar results in his studies of behaviour in churches, arrival times at work and obedience to traffic signals. Allport's results have been regarded as characteristic of behaviour in the field only and not relevant to the laboratory. However, if the similarity of the results of the studies by Milgram and Martin et al. is considered, it follows that subjects respond to the edicts of formal authority in the laboratory very much as they do elsewhere (Tajfel, 1972). Subjects arrive in the laboratory with a cultural perspective with which they interpret the demands of the situation. Consequently, an explanation of action in terms of a cultural perspective of authority is more feasible than approaching the problem the other way around and regarding experimental results as explaining action in 'real-life' (Spillane & Martin, 2018, p. 221). Either way, evidence indicates that Friedrich's construct of authority as reasoned elaboration in terms of community standards is a far from antiquated basis for influencing people and gaining their validation in a wide variety of activities.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
All authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION
Robert Spillane: Conceptualization; Writing – original draft. Jean-Etienne Joullié: Writing – review & editing.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Data sharing not applicable to this article, because no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study. The article describes entirely theoretical research.

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Human resource management studies and leadership practice: Oil and water in the same vessel

Abstract

The task of integrating human resource management studies with conjecture about leadership requires that such reconciliation is possible. As elemental as this prerequisite might seem when made explicit, it has largely remained unchallenged. In this article, it is argued that human resource management theory and practice, and conjecture about leadership invoke incompatible ways of speaking about how to obtain corporate objectives and entail differing perspectives of obedience. As such, reconciling the two domains necessitates, as a primary undertaking, revisiting the unitarist foundation upon which orthodox human resource management is based. Such a reformulation is possible and, when done, will enable human resource management scholars fully to benefit from the insight provided by their peers writing about leadership.

Introduction

Human resource management (HRM) and leadership, as human encounters and research areas, are concerned with mobilising people toward attaining goals, if through differing means. Specifically, human resources managers and scholars rely on organisation-wide systems and processes to direct personal as well as collective behaviour, whereas leadership invokes interpersonal, psychosocial dynamics. In a recent special issue of *Human Resource Management Review*, guest editors Leroy et al. (2018: 1053) lamented the "deplorable" lack of integration between HRM and leadership studies, an integration they thought not only possible but desirable in view of their overlapping concerns. Den Hartog and Boon (2013) also advocated for closer links between the two domains. In their view (den Hartog & Boon, 2013: 198), the near complete independence of HRM and leadership studies is "surprising", notably because "formal leaders", such as line managers, are typically those tasked with implementing HRM policies on a daily basis (a point made in several other contributions, e.g.: Piening, Baluch & Ridder, 2014 and Gilbert, De Winne & Sels, 2014). The consensus of these authors is that better integration of the two domains will yield new theoretical insights into each and ensuing improved workforce practices.

Turning policies designed by HRM departments of large firms into effective practices has proved to be a challenging task, one for which scholars and practitioners have been awarded, in the words of Kaufman (2012), a "failing grade" (on this matter, see also Woodrow & Guest, 2014; Bach, 2013; Boselie, 2013 and Edwards & Bach, 2013). Proposed generic explanations for such a letdown include misalignment between HRM priorities and corporate objectives (Bowen & Ostroff, 2016), insufficient recognition of the contribution of line management to the implementation of HRM policies (Harney & Jordan, 2008), incorrect or incomplete implementation of HRM practices (Wright & Nishii, 2013) and suboptimal collaboration between human resources departments and line managers (Sanders & Frenkel, 2011).

To explain the general inefficacy of HRM policies, some researchers have been reluctant to invoke diffuse organisational dysfunction. They have instead placed emphasis on (purported) inadequate interpersonal skill of line managers when it comes to communicating about and enacting HRM policies (Nishii et al., 2018; Sikora et al., 2015; Sikora & Ferris, 2014). As remedy to these latter problems, scholars have identified "sensegiving" leadership behaviours intended to assist in delivering HRM effectiveness (Nishii & Paluch, 2018: 321) or recommended that line managers (as well as human resources managers) adopt particular styles of leadership, notably authentic (Gill et al., 2018) and transformational (den Hartog & Boon, 2013). In these contributions, leadership is portrayed as the ideal relational embodiment of HRM practice, or at least as something of a blueprint for an employment relationship that delivers the touted benefit of HRM policies.

The current authors do not take issue with the proposition that workplace leadership and relationships regulated by HRM policies affect the conduct (and performance) of people at work. However, assisting leadership and HRM scholars in producing novel theoretical insights and practical implications requires more than pointing out that their respective domains are overlapping. Indeed, such an endeavour requires the identifying of specific common conceptual underpinnings and practical objectives, from which theories are developed, hypotheses formulated and studies conducted. In this regard, it is noteworthy that, in delineating research directions through which leadership and HRM scholars could cooperate and ultimately define "human resource leadership", Leroy et al. (2018: 255) did not sort common from dissimilar conceptual tenets affecting the two disciplines. Such sorting was also conspicuously overlooked in each of the six contributions forming the Special Issue that Leroy and his colleagues introduced in their editorial.

In the current article, it is argued that trying to integrate HRM studies (and the implementation of the policies that flow from HRM research) with leadership practice is a misguided effort, at least as things currently stand. A crucial roadblock exists because leadership, as a human encounter, and HRM, as a body of ideas and practices, rest on partly incompatible conceptual underpinnings and have different priorities when it comes to mobilising people for productive activity. Concisely, whilst HRM theory and practice flow out of a mostly unitarist view of the employment relationship, leadership is a relationship that is sustained within or outside workplaces in ways that accommodates a plurality of interests temporarily subsumable under authoritative agreement and direction. Furthermore, the implementation of HRM policies requires submission (voluntary or not) of employees, whereas leadership entails followership, that is, voluntary compliance with a leader's directions. It follows from these divergences that reconciling HRM studies and leadership practice requires revisiting the conceptual foundations of the former (the latter, by virtue of being a spontaneous human encounter is not amenable to conceptual redesign). Such reformulation of HRM ideology and theory will not diminish the discipline. Indeed, it will re-invigorate it through creating novel research agendas and by providing human resources practitioners a more crystallised behavioural template.

The structure of the present article is the following. In its first section, the theoretical underpinnings of HRM studies are described and critically evaluated. This exercise indicates that HRM, as a body of ideas, rests on a unitarist view of the employment relationship that has given rise to descriptive, prescriptive and instrumental claims. However, further analysis reveals that assertions made within each of these categories are either not well supported by evidence or incompatible with those from other categories. The second part of the article builds on a recently published analysis of leadership situations as well as on Friedrich's (1963; 1972) theory of authority. It contends that leadership, as distinct from management, is a human encounter grounded in authority. Authority, it is further argued, is distinct from legitimate power and emerges from reasonable elaboration, a process that entails acceptable descriptive, argumentative and prescriptive claims about salient issues. Drawing on such theses, the third section of the article argues that HRM-regulated relationships are irreconcilable with leadership situations. The conclusion summarises the article's contribution, highlights its consequences for HRM research and exposes why and how HRM scholars as well as practitioners will benefit from a refoundation of their discipline.

Human resource management: A primer and critique

According to Allan Fox (1966; 1974), who delineated the construct, a unitarist perspective of the employment relationship is one where vital employer and employee interests are considered to be mostly similar and advanced when corporate objectives are obtained.[1] Seen from this standpoint, organisational cohesion derives from management, the source of legitimate power within workplaces. As such, for the unitarist, conflict between capital and labour is by nature illegitimate and, to the extent that it occurs, manifests either misunderstanding (or mischief) on the part of employees or inadequate governance and superintendence. In the same vein, employee grievance processes and representative institutions, such as unions and work councils, are superfluous because the expectations and interests of the workforce organically coincide with (and are satisfactorily addressed through) establishing relevant corporate objectives. Conversely, a pluralist view of the employment relationship embraces the notion that employees simultaneously have convergent and divergent interests with their employer. As such, those who take a pluralist perspective commit themselves to elucidating the ways (such as collective bargaining) through which that conflict is regulated (Godard, 2011).

Although dissenting views exist (e.g., Thompson & Harley, 2007), there is broad agreement in literature that HRM theory generally has developed from a unitarist conception of the employment relationship (Greenwood & Van Buren, 2017; Geare et al., 2014; Bach, 2013; Boselie, 2013; Edwards, 2013; Godard, 2011; Dundon & Gollan, 2007). The consensus orientation typical of HRM scholars, indeed of most management authors irrespective of their research focus, is that the manager is the main source of knowledge on corporate objectives and is, as such, endowed with the exclusive right to make decisions and issue directions (Kaufman, 2008). This comment is not meant to imply that all HRM authors and professionals are explicitly committed to unitarism. Indeed, as Greenwood and Van Buren (2017: 663) noted, "whilst [within HRM circles] there is little overt discussion of unitarism or use of the term itself, unitarist assumptions provide the ideological underpinning of much contemporary mainstream HRM research and practice."

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[1] Fox's work in this area has sometimes been misrepresented and interpreted (variously) as being about 'kinds of workplaces' or pertaining to 'conflict in the workplace'. In fact, his contention was that unitarism (no consequential conflict between employers and employees), pluralism (regulatable conflict between employers and employees) and Marxism (irresolvable conflict between employers and employees) are perspectives held by parties to the employment relationship and give rise to employment relations patterns.

The unitarist view of firm governance that characterises orthodox HRM research and practice has its origins in scholarship from the early twentieth century and the ideas of luminaries such as Taylor, Ford, Fayol and the Gilbreths (Bowden, 2018). For some scholars, HRM's unitarist premise is also a manifestation of the managerialist agenda that formed much of the impetus for the foundation of the discipline and distinguished it from Human Relations-informed scholarship, which sought to accommodate discordant workplace interests (Batt & Banerjee, 2012; Brewster, 2007; Francis & Keegan, 2006). Whatever the case, a consequence of the contemporary unitarist perspective is de-emphasis on the part of scholars of employee perception of HRM practices. As such, and by way of example, some HRM researchers advocate single stakeholder (i.e., management) surveys rather than multiple stakeholder research (Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010; Becker & Huselid, 2006). For other like-minded authors, the consensus orientation of most HRM research provides defensible rationale for a top-down (management-controlled) form of workplace governance (Kaufman, 2008). For still others, HRM scholarship is so deeply unitarist in its tenets and outcomes that the two expressions ('HRM' and 'unitarism') have become synonymous (Greenwood & Van Buren, 2017; Keenoy 1999).

The assumption that labour and capital share vital interests and objectives that pervades much of HRM literature is perhaps best exemplified in Ulrich's (1997) influential (4366 citations at the time of writing) typology of the roles that human resource professionals fulfill concurrently. These roles include 'Strategic Partner', 'Change Agent' (in which the practitioner facilitates the turning of corporate objectives into results) and 'Employee Champion' (in which the practitioner identifies, and advocates for, the needs and expectations of employees but only insofar as doing so cultivates a corporate contribution). In other words, according to Ulrich and most HRM scholars after him, human resources professionals act simultaneously on behalf of employers and employees. The possibility that a clash of priorities arises in the concurrent discharge of these three assignments is not considered. In the same vein, the term 'conflict' does not appear in the Index of Ulrich's book and, within the tome itself, the word 'unions' receives only a single and fleeting mention.

HRM literature typically embodies three implicit and interrelated claims that arise from its unitarist premise (Greenwood & Van Buren, 2017; Geare, Edgar & McAndrew, 2006). First, authors in the domain assume that consequential firm actors each in fact hold a unitarist perspective for an employment relationship to exist (this is the descriptive, or empirical, claim, already noted). Second, HRM scholars promote commitment to a unitarist view as a generic

employer objective (normative claim) because, third, the practices flowing from such a perspective achieve superior organisational performance (instrumental claim). It is noteworthy that, far from being peripheral, the instrumental claim (the objective of improving firm, as opposed to employee, performance) is the *raison d'être* for much HRM research (Greenwood & Van Buren, 2017; Geare, Edgar & McAndrew, 2006). Specifically, scholars typically recommend to managers that they adopt HRM policies that are lumped together under the umbrella phrase 'high commitment systems' to increase employee commitment to corporate objectives (Park, Bae & Wong, 2019) and 'high performance work practices' (Nientied & Shutina, 2017) to improve employee output. Examples of such policies include performance appraisal and development methods (Schleicher et al., 2018), as well as protocols aimed at, for example, union suppression and substitution (Dundon, 2016). In such cases, the unitarist (managerial) bias is, perhaps paradoxically, both implicit and transparent.

Notably under the pen of critical management authors (e.g., Collings & Wood, 2018) and industrial relations scholars (e.g., Wilkinson, Redman & Dundon, 2017), critique of HRM research and practice has developed along several lines.[2] While the former authors tend to see in HRM practice a form of soft enslavement of employees, the latter admonish HRM researchers for failing to recognise the existence of legitimate employee interests that are irreconcilable with corporate ones. Critical evaluation of HRM scholarship on ethical grounds has also proved to be a prominent theme in literature (e.g., Greenwood, 2013). Whatever the case, more germane to the present argument are denunciations focusing specifically on HRM's unitarist-perspective underpinnings. Indeed, authors have argued that the three aforementioned claims (descriptive, normative and instrumental) made in HRM literature are unverified, incoherent and unsubstantiated. These critiques will now be discussed.

The HRM unitarist assumption (identified as the aforementioned descriptive claim), that the interests of parties to the employment relationship are aligned with respect to matters of consequence, has received more critical attention than HRM studies' other foundational tenets. For example, already fifty-five years ago, Fox (1966: 4) argued that the unitarist ideology, which he saw as consubstantial to management literature, was an illusion "incongruent with reality." In a similar vein, Anthony (1977: 252) held that unitarism had been abandoned by "sophisticated managers." If Anthony's conclusion ever had empirical support, it no longer

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[2] As things stand, 'critical human resource management' has emerged as a subfield of research.

does. Indeed, after surveying 798 firms in Ireland and New Zealand, Geare et al. (2014: 14-15) found that, among those reporting an opinion, most managers believed unitarism to be an apt description of their workplaces. Moore and Gardener (2004) reported the same finding about managers within the Australian metal mining industry.

The tendency of managers to view the employment relationship in unitarist terms is unsurprising. For those with governance and stewardship responsibilities, acknowledging legitimate competing interest in a workplace inevitably undermines their efforts to unite employees in the pursuit of a set of corporate objectives. As such, unitarism is well interpreted as a consequence of a neoliberal philosophy concerning management. In this regard, Friedman's (1970) (in)famous essay is revealing: if the primary responsibility of managers is to increase profits, they can only reject responsibility for, and in fact existence of, diverging interests within the firms they oversee. However, there is evidence that, whatever the case concerning the limits of management's role, employees mostly do not view their workplaces as being instantiations of unitarist hegemony. For example, in the same study that reported managers' preference for unitarism, Geare et al. (2014) found that employees mostly believed that the umbrella term pluralism well described their firm culture and protocols. Furthermore, they also found that most managers, when asked to describe the employment relationship in capitalist market economies (and not merely that existing in their own firm) considered pluralism a better descriptor than unitarism. In other words, managers often view their own workplace as an outlier case in an overall pluralist societal landscape.

A substantial stream of HRM literature investigates the benefit for employers of involving employees in decision making through employee participation, workplace partnership and workplace democracy programmes (e.g., Saridakis, Lai & Johnstone, 2020; Timming, 2014; Knudsen, Busck & Lind, 2011). Whatever the merits of such schemes, a scholarly interest in the effect on firm performance of a system of joint regulation within firms is at odd with the unitarist basis typical of HRM scholarship (Greenwood & Van Buren, 2017: 668). Further, admitting the existence of multiple contributors to organisational objectives within firms is only a short conceptual step from acknowledging diverging, if perhaps temporary or reconcilable, interests between capital and labour. Moreover, evidence for such misalignment of management and employee perception of prevailing ideology, comparable to that reported in Geare et al. (2014), has started to be reported in literature (e.g., Kohoe & Wright, 2013; Liao et al, 2009).

The normative claim of HRM research (the view that unitarism is a desirable outcome for employers) represents tacit recognition that unitarism as a natural or base state is not a faithful

depiction of the employment relationship. Indeed, recommending as a norm a situation that already and, according to HRM orthodoxy, spontaneously and necessarily exists is paradoxical (Geare, Edgar & McAndrew, 2006: 1192). More bluntly, if the interests of employees and employers are shared by the mere circumstance of each of these actors being party to the employment relationship, then advice to align these interests is inutile and effort to realise that alignment wasted. In this sense, the unitarist normative claim of HRM scholarship undermines its descriptive claim because it is an indirect yet plain admission that workplace interests do not naturally align. Rather, as Greenwood and Van Buren (2017: 671) argue, the normative claim merely highlights that the so-called 'shared interests' of HRM-informed discourse are those that managers define and that employees have to 'share' (i.e., accept).

The instrumental claim of HRM literature supports its normative aspect and, as such, is another manifestation of the aforementioned contradiction concerning recommending something that exists spontaneously (or as part of the natural order). It is noteworthy that, to the extent that HRM scholars embrace the orthodoxy of their discipline, they establish unitarism as the default perspective for managers. In so doing, they make two related assertions. First, HRM policies and practices enhance alignment of employer and employee interests. Second, alignment of employer and employee interests produces superior firm performance. The latter outcome is typically said to be delivered indirectly, moderated by constructs and variables such as organisational cohesiveness, enhanced workforce commitment to the firm and increased employee motivation (Jia et al., 2020; Bowen & Ostroff, 2016; Rudman, 2010; Whitener, 2001).

Casual workplace observation or a brief conversation with a manager (or other firm actor) provides evidence that HRM policies, sometimes referred to collectively as a 'HRM system', are often ineffective or at least overhyped. Indeed, and more formally, while there are a few studies reporting a significant positive correlation between the practice of archetypal HRM policies and organisational performance (e.g., Moideenkutty, Al-Lamki, & Sree Rama Murthy, 2011), a meta-analysis of HRM effectiveness research has produced disquieting findings. Specifically, Tzabbar, Tzafrir and Baruch (2017), after analysing 89 studies, found a negligible association between so-called sophisticated HRM policies and corporate performance. These researchers attributed almost all the variation in their study's dependent variable to the contribution of constructs such as context, firm size and executive skill. For other scholars, the malaise is more fundamental inasmuch as it is not even clear how to assess the efficacy of an HRM system. For example, following a review of 495 research articles, Boon, Den Hartog and

Lepak (2019) found that the construct of an HRM system (as distinct from individual practices) is ill-defined and that there is inadequate agreement about the nature and scope of the effects of the HRM function on firm performance and how to measure such effects.

An additional reason to question a purportedly positive association between the existence of so-called sophisticated (e.g., high performance) HRM policies and firm performance comes, paradoxically, from HRM research itself. Specifically and as noted, the fact that there is evidence that such things as employee participation, inclusion and workplace democracy produce broad corporate benefit (e.g., Knudsen, Busck & Lind, 2011; Timming, 2014) is also evidence that notions of ubiquitous managerial control are, if not entirely ill-conceived, at least on the wrong track. Indeed, this corpus of scholarship represents an implicit acknowledgement that employees harbour interests that are not spontaneously known by their firm's management (since they need to be voiced through democratic processes). Such admission that managers do not know everything – and certainly not everything about what matters to their employees – is incongruent with the idea that it is possible to manage employees based on a unitarist perspective of the employment relationship (the framework that HRM scholars typically embrace). In these circumstances, human resources managers find themselves compromised. The lion's share of recommendations within their standard texts arises from a unitarist perspective of the employment relationship; however, they are also sometimes thrown curveballs departing from such orthodoxy in the form of advice about workplace democracy, inclusion, employee participation and the like. In practice, improved firm performance is an unlikely outcome of this kind of inconsistent stance. As Strauss (2001: 892) put it, "workers, managers (and even vice-presidents) will resist managerial policies they do not like" or the logic of which they do not understand.

In summary, mainstream HRM scholarship manifests a unitarist perspective through making three kinds of claims (descriptive: unitarism is an adequate characterisation of the employment relationship; normative: the employment relationship should be unitarist; and instrumental: the unitarist employment relationship is beneficial to employers). However, as some have noted, there are reasons to doubt the validity of the empirical claim (which a stream of HRM research undermines), the normative assertion is at odd with the descriptive one, and the validity of the instrumental proposition is, at best, uncertain (undecidable for some). Those authors who recommend that HRM research benefits from leadership scholarship (and that the encounters that human resource managers have within workplaces are instantiations of

leadership) ignore this kind of ambiguity. The discussion now turns to probing further this conundrum.

Leadership, language and authority

Providing a characterisation of leadership applicable to all relevant encounters has been a challenging endeavour. In the absence of consensus about the construct's essential nature, theories of leadership have proliferated over the last decades, each based on differing analyses of the relationship and accompanied with its own set of recommendations for aspiring leaders. Scholars attempting syntheses of the existing disparate frameworks have found that the most they can offer is schemes which situate models on arbitrary axes (e.g., Dionne et al., 2014; Hernandez et al., 2011). While such classification endeavour assists leadership researchers in identifying overlooked (as well as overworked) research areas and in connecting these with issues from other bodies of knowledge (including HRM), it does not offer guidance on how to reconcile the phenomenon of leadership with the notion of effective HRM.

Eschewing difficulties associated with proposing an overall definition of leadership, Joullié et al. (2021) note that leadership situations are mediated through co-constructed communication processes and rest exclusively on voluntary obedience (these points are widely accepted in literature; see for example Antonakis et al., 2016; Choi & Schnurr, 2014; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). Indeed, if leaders could force others into behaving in certain ways, they would not be called leaders but, depending on context, dictators, autocrats, bullies, police officers, managers or other terms associated with the possibility of coercion. As such, leaders are individuals capable of convincing, inspiring or emboldening others to follow their instructions, that is, to act in ways that they (the leaders) prescribe but have no institutionally conferred (sometimes identified as 'legitimate') ability to enforce. Such directions typically pertain to problems with which followers are grappling and that leaders propose, in convincing ways, to address (Carmeli, Gelbard & Reiter-Palmon, 2013). As part of this unfolding, followers subordinate, at least temporarily, a degree of their personal independence to group or corporate norms in tackling situations that they deem unsatisfactory (Spillane & Joullié, 2015).

Followers follow: they consent to, and act upon, their leader's directions because they agree with the detail and general intent of these communications. This phenomenon enabled Joullié et al. (2021) to propose a linguistic model through which exchanges can be analysed as denoting leadership as opposed to other relationships in which one party dominates (or seeks to

dominate) another. Specifically, leadership exchanges are, in large measure, regulated by language elements that are designed to produce voluntary obedience, but which exclude orders, threats, warnings and other common means of coercion. Since workplace interactions are mediated through language and involve obedience (or at least compliance with established processes), the model advanced by Joullié et al. (2021) is appropriate for determining whether HRM-regulated relationships are compatible with leadership encounters.

The framework proposed by Joullié et al. (2021) invokes a hierarchy of linguistic functions, the tiers of which are ordered according to the principle of logical entailment. In this case, logical entailment means that use of a function of a given level cannot occur without activation of lower echelon functions. Further, each function is activated at either of two possible antithetical values (see Table 1).[3] Relevant language functions – portrayed as tiers on the hierarchy – are description, argumentation, prescription and (at the apex) promises. In verbal exchange, interacting parties activate these functions in different and possibly non coherent and conflicting ways. Specifically, descriptions can be either true or not-true (or partly so), arguments valid or non-valid, recommendations founded or unfounded and promises responsible or non-responsible (these are the aforementioned antithetical values).[4]

| Level | Function | Content | Values | |
			Authoritative	Authoritarian
4	Promissory	Promises	Responsibility	Non-responsibility
3	Prescriptive	Recommendations	Founded	Non-founded
2	Argumentative	Justifications	Valid	Non-valid
1	Descriptive	Descriptions	Truth	Non-truth

Table 1: Main functions of language, their content and possible values (adapted from Joullié et al., 2021).

Joullié et al. (2021) argue that since leadership entails exclusively voluntary obedience, it emerges and develops most consequentially from communications that listeners find

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[3] As originally conceived, antithetical values for each of these functions were established as dichotomous or binary in nature and not, for example, as being continuously scaled.

[4] These formulations draw on the Aristotelian elemental laws of identity (something is 'A' or 'non A'), non-contradiction (if something is 'A', it cannot simultaneously be 'non A') and excluded middle (for every proposition, either it or its direct negation must be true). Hence, terms such as 'true' and 'non true' as opposed to 'true' and 'false', etc. are invoked.

convincing. Acknowledging that no language guarantees persuasion, the same authors hold that the suasory power of those aspiring to lead is maximised when they advance (and are acknowledged for doing so by their prospective followers) true descriptions, sound arguments, justified prescriptions and responsible promises. Building on Friedrich's (1963; 1972) theory of authority, Joullié et al. (2021) classify such a deployment of words and phraseology as authoritative and its antithesis authoritarian. This dichotomy of language use is central to the argument being defended here and therefore requires elaboration.

Friedrich (1963; 1972) rejected the view that authority is a dimension of power, legitimate or otherwise (Spillane & Joullié, 2021). In so doing, he placed himself at odds with authors such as Weber (1947), Barnard (1938) and Simon (1976) and, more broadly, with prevailing orthodoxy. Specifically, for him, authority is a quality of a communication that makes a missive acceptable. Friedrich (1963: 224) proposed that a communication is authoritative (as opposed to authoritarian) when it is accompanied by reasonable elaboration, or at least is able to be reasonably elaborated.[5] This capacity for reasoned elaboration is in terms of 'the opinions, values, beliefs, interests and needs of the community within which the authority operates' (Friedrich, 1963: 226). In authoritative exchanges, communications are recognised, if at times implicitly, as being supported by reasons why the content of the missive is desirable (see the example provided in footnote 5). That is, authoritative communications are those that are supported by reasons why their acceptance should be granted. This requirement applies to speakers who establish their *bona fides* as authoritative when they reasonably elaborate their views in such a way that the messages they advance are willingly accepted. Perhaps paradoxically (and as indicated), authoritative individuals are not authoritarian. Indeed, they welcome critical debate and facilitate its realisation. By contrast, individuals in positions of institutionalised (legitimate) power are able to enforce obedience without engaging in reasoned elaboration. They do so (to varying degrees) through means such as commands, threats, coercion and manipulation.

According to Friedrich's (1972) perspective, power and authority are conceptually related and often work synergistically. Moreover, each can be viewed as manifesting obedience. However, each is distinguishable because authority is a source, rather than a form, of power. Specifically, it is a quality of individuals and their communications that supports and augments

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[5] For example, A says to B: 'go and wash your hands'. The parties to this exchange each know (without so stating) that such a missive could be associated with rationale (i.e., reasonably elaborated) if required.

their power, but it is not itself legitimate power. Indeed, authority is not legitimate power because legitimate power exists without reasonable elaboration (Friedrich, 1963: 226-227). Such situations arise when incumbents do not elaborate or justify their communications (or have stopped doing so). In workplaces, what is required for managers to be authoritative is a demonstration or a conviction that they offer useful guidance in facilitating the attainment of collective goals. Managers who have 'lost their authority' have thus lost a form of their power because their communications are deficient. This kind of deficiency emerges when managers cease to engage in reasoned elaboration ('do as I say or else…') or because the values of their listeners have changed in such a way as to make their (the managers') arguments less convincing (Spillane & Joullié, 2021).

The linguistic framework defended by Joullié et al. (2021) indicates that those aspiring to workplace leadership have constrained language use options. Specifically, engaging in reasoned elaboration to create authoritative communications requires describing situations accurately and completely, using sound arguments to obtain cooperation (but always being at ease with conclusions and recommendations being challenged). As noted, people weigh personal independence against group effectiveness; that is, they grant authority pursuant to achieving a collective objective or refuse to do so in the name of personal independence. Expressed differently, aspiring leaders, as opposed to authoritarians, appreciate the existence of the conflict, within their listeners, between an aspiration for independence and the desire to make a corporate contribution. They seek to ease this tension through invoking a language that facilitates a common analysis of existing problems and a shared embrace of solutions.

Those already in positions of institutionalised power can aspire to leadership by issuing authoritative communications. They can also elect to invoke words and phraseology with incorrect or incomplete descriptions, fallacious arguments and sophisms in an effort to appear authoritative. Unlike aspiring leaders, however, they have the possibility to call on orders if they are content being perceived as transparently authoritarian. Orders need to be communicated and, if need be, confirmed or clarified. They need not, however, require reasonable elaboration, because execution of a direction entails understanding but not consent or conviction that the instruction will have desirable consequences. As such, when orders are delivered, whatever tension between autonomy and heteronomy that exists in those to whom they are directed is resolved through coercion. In essence, speakers who rely on orders do not secure authority in Friedrich's (1963) sense, that is, as reasoned elaboration. Rather, they are incumbents as opposed to leaders because they are able to produce obedience without consent.

Unlike those who follow because they agree with what their leader says, subordinates obey without necessarily perceiving that the missive is accompanied by reasonable elaboration or that such justification is likely to be forthcoming.

Conceiving workplace leadership as a relationship resting on authoritative exchanges does not assume either the existence or non-existence of a divergence of interests within the employment relationship. In other words, the perspective of leadership proposed by Joullié et al. (2021), as well as Friedrich's (1963; 1972) theory of authority, is neutral in that it does not require that one adopt either a unitarist or pluralist perspective of the employment relationship (to use Fox's parlance). However, a conception of leadership as grounded in authority implies that whatever interest misalignment exists between labour and capital, it is temporarily, and at least partially, regulatable through obtaining agreement about a corporate policy or managerial decision. Agreement of this kind is possible because, even according to a pluralist perspective, policies and decisions are often deemed reasonable (in the sense of rational, ethical, desirable and acceptable) by parties to the employment relationship (Joullié & Spillane, 2021).

In summary, if leadership entails exclusively voluntary obedience and if authority is understood as the quality of a communication that makes it acceptable because it is able to be reasonably elaborated, then it follows that leadership is established and maintained by way of authoritative language. Further, authoritative language is that which relies on true descriptions, valid arguments and justified advice, and which culminates in responsible promises embedded in, and developed through, critical debate. Conversely, authoritarian language involves non-true, biased or incomplete descriptions, fallacious arguments, unjustified recommendations and orders, and, ultimately, irresponsible promises (Joullié et al., 2021: 10-11).

Human resource management in the leadership mirror

In workplaces, incumbents of high office tend to see themselves as superior individuals and not mere holders of positions in power structures (Treiman, 2013). Accordingly, they are inclined to believe that they are being obeyed because they have leadership qualities and not owing to their prosaic ability to reward and punish. However, if all those able to enforce obedience qualified as leaders, tyrants, bullies and authoritarian bureaucrats would have a claim on the title. Yet, as the terminology plainly indicates, being a leader entails having followers, not merely subordinates. This observation, of course, does not preclude the possibility that being a subordinate fits comfortably with being a follower.

As far as creating leadership exchanges is concerned, most managers start from a favourable position. Specifically, their hierarchical position, which entails the power to give orders and enforce their execution, is compatible with (indeed, normally requires) that they be perceived as competent decision-makers. To ensure their directions are executed, managers often make the necessary effort to engage in reasonable elaboration to convince (to a greater or lesser extent) listeners that their communications are acceptable on moral, empirical and logical grounds (typically in this order). Expressed differently, most managers have the choice of being authoritarian (when they issue commands) or authoritative (when they elaborate and discuss them). However (and as explained), only the latter communication style creates leadership conditions.[6]

Unlike most of their colleagues, human resources managers aspiring to achieve leadership encounters face a formidable challenge. Indeed, their communications are constrained by the unitarist perspective which underpins the body of ideas and practices that they are meant to be conversant with, and advocate for. In other words, HRM theory informs and frames what these managers say and do. As such, human resources managers, if they want to be faithful representatives of their discipline and practitioners of the policies it justifies, convey and promote the descriptive, normative and instrumental contentions that are core to the HRM agenda. In so doing, they advance propositions that are, for reasons detailed earlier in this article, vulnerable to empirical refutation, in addition to forming a logically incoherent discourse. Specifically, seen through the lens of the linguistic hierarchy defended in Joullié et al (2021), the descriptive statements of human resources managers concerning the unitarist nature of the employment relationship will be received as dubious at best. Moreover, given such uncertain description, their defence of a unitarism perspective of the employment relationship is a losing struggle. Consequently, their recommendations to implement HRM-informed policies will be assessed as unjustified and their promise of ensuing firm performance improvement non-responsible. Indeed, rhetoric delivering such missives has under-developed rationale, i.e., lacks credible empirical support and is associated with spurious logic.

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[6] Circumstances restrict, at least partially, managerial discretion. Specifically, since reasonable elaboration requires time (to prepare for and engage in constructive discussions), conditions which require urgent action typically call for orders (which can be revisited later and found suboptimal), whereas those involving medium to long-term concerns or recurring difficulties leave room for argument and critical debate (Stern et al., 2016).

Deprived of rationale, human resources managers find their ability to speak authoritative language severely compromised, especially when confronted by argumentative colleagues. In this regard, it is noteworthy that use of high performance work practices correlates with firm performance only when mediated by an organizational climate characterised by openness, acceptance of confrontation, trust and autonomy (Muduli, 2015). These features are hallmarks of authoritative exchanges, but since they are inimical to the orthodoxy of managerialism supported by the HRM function (Spillane & Joullié, 2021; Batt & Banerjee, 2012), it is doubtful whether practices which actually improve firm performance should be viewed as an embodiment of mainstream HRM. Whatever the case, struggling to establish their authority, the garden variety human resources manager is left to resort to orders, that is, authoritarian language, to have directions executed and policies implemented. In adopting such a communication style, she weakens – to the point of annihilation – her claims to leadership status. Similar comments apply to line managers, insofar as they engage in and communicate about HRM-related activities.

The incompatibility of HRM's unitarist foundation with leadership practice exonerates line managers from the charge (noted in the Introduction) that they either lack enthusiasm for HRM-informed policies or the skill required for implementing such policies. In fact, one can commiserate with managers tasked with defending practices and conveying communications, the underpinnings and content of which undermine the authority that they typically seek to establish on non-HRM related matters. Similarly, the "failing grade" (Kaufman, 2012) awarded to managers' effort to turn HRM policies into effective practices attests more to their dedication to elaborate reasonably their communications than to a professional deficiency.

The paucity of evidence for its descriptive and instrumental claims, combined with its internal contradictions, makes it challenging to defend the proposition that HRM discourse is compatible with authoritative language. As has long been apparent in literature (e.g., Greenwood & Van Buren, 2017; Geare et al., 2014; Godard, 2011; Anthony, 1977; Fox, 1966, 1974), the credibility of HRM's message is beyond repair in the eyes of those scholars and employees not seduced by managerialism. Indeed, for the sceptics, no amount of leadership "sensegiving" (Nishii & Paluch, 2018) will rehabilitate the HRM construct. Rather, the more scholars and professionals advocate for and adopt leadership behaviours (be they of the authentic or transformational kind), that is, the more they seek to establish and promote their authority by way of true statements, valid reasoning, justified advice and responsible promises, the less attractive orthodox HRM discourse appears.

The current authors do not cast aspersions on the intentions of HRM professionals and scholars. Indeed, there is no reason to believe that leadership aspirations of human resources managers and the desire of HRM researchers to integrate their discipline with leadership studies are cynical or disingenuous. Rather, the thesis here defended is that, in a nutshell, the strictures of HRM theory have been overlooked as needing adjustment in efforts to reconcile the discipline with leadership encounters. For "deplorable" (Leroy et al., 2018) and "surprising" (den Hartog & Boon, 2013) as it is for some scholars, such disconnect is a logical (and thus unavoidable) consequence of the discipline's managerialist foundations.

Conclusion: Confronting human resource leadership

In a sense, albeit probably not that intended by the authors whose works were referred to in the introduction of the present article, integrating leadership with HRM does produce new insights. Specifically, it reveals that leadership, contrary to these scholars' portrayals, is not the ideal relational embodiment of HRM policies derived from orthodox HRM theory. Rather, for "human resource leadership" (Leroy et al., 2018: 255) to exist, the underpinning assumptions of HRM theory need challenging. There are four reasons to hold such a view.

First, HRM, as a body of ideas, practices and research agendas, emanates from a unitarist perspective of the employment relationship, one in which employer and employee interests (or at least the most consequential of these) align. Accordingly, HRM scholars and practitioners consider conflict between capital and labour as ill-founded and the result of employee misunderstanding or ill-intention, or attribute it to mismanagement. To remedy such organisational dysfunction, HRM scholars advance, test and promote (and HRM professionals implement) theory-driven policies. In so doing, they perhaps unwittingly advance two ideological agendas: a unitarist perspective is ethically desirable (normative claim) when, within a workplace, there is broad commitment to a unitarist view of the employment relationship, organisational performance improves (instrumental claim).

Second, the three claims that structure HRM scholarship and policies have inadequate empirical support and entail spurious logic. Specifically, research (e.g., Geare et al., 2014) indicates that the descriptive claim (according to which workplace participants mostly view the employment relation in unitarist terms) is not embraced by employees insofar as it concerns their own employment circumstances. Simultaneously, managers typically believe that they preside over unitarist workplaces whereas other equivalent *milieus* are generally pluralist in their orientation. Further, the normative claim (according to which workplace participants

should be compelled, or at least encouraged, to view the employment relationship as unitarist) contradicts the descriptive claim, because it is illogical to want to change something into what it already is. Finally, the instrumental claim (making firms unitarist improves their performance), in addition to contradicting the descriptive view, has received at best lukewarm empirical support.

Third, since it entails only voluntary obedience, leadership is a relationship grounded in authority understood as a source (not a form) of power, that is, authority conceived as the capacity for, and competence with, reasonable elaboration. Indeed, short of coercing their audience (an approach antithetical to leadership encounters, for reasons provided), those who aspire to lead can only seek to convince those who listen to them that their communications are reasonable and thus acceptable, if only to overcome particular issues with which the group is grappling. To achieve authoritativeness, speakers activate specific language functions in distinctive ways. More precisely, and although no phraseology forms guarantee persuasiveness, those aspiring to leadership maximise their claim to authority by communicating with their audience in a language of true descriptions, valid arguments, justified prescriptions and responsible promises. By contrast, a language of non-true, incomplete or biased descriptions, deceptive or spurious arguments, baseless recommendations (and orders without justification), culminating in non-responsible promises characterises authoritarian speakers.

Fourth, and consequently, individuals who speak within the constraints of mainstream HRM theory cannot establish authority and, as such, cannot secure leadership status. Indeed, the doubts about its descriptive and instrumental claims, combined with the contradictions that exist between these claims and the descriptive assumption of HRM theory, make achieving authority elusive when attempted within the confines of HRM-informed discourse. In such circumstances, managers will not convince a critical audience of the reasonableness of HRM policies; rather, they will have to impose their regimes through executive orders. In so doing, they act as authoritarian decision-makers. Some soften such a *modus operandum* through invoking the expression 'managerialism' (cf. Spillane & Joullié, 2021). This conclusion is consistent with the managerialist ideology of HRM theory.

As it stands, an HRM-informed discourse does not pass the authoritativeness test in the eyes of a critical and dispassionate audience expecting a strong base of evidence and respect of the principles of logic. This deficiency prevents those advocating for the HRM agenda from securing workplace leadership status. It follows that, if HRM scholars are serious about enriching their discipline through drawing on the insights of leadership studies, they need to

revisit their perspective of the employment relationship. Among the three claims that underpin and frame the HRM agenda, the descriptive one is the first candidate for reappraisal, since it is often singled-out as being the most fundamental to the discipline (e.g., Greenwood & Van Buren, 2017; Godard, 2011).

HRM scholars pursuing 'human resource leadership' are confronted with the perhaps inconvenient conclusion that the unitarist perspective of the employment relationship that gave birth to their discipline is also a consequential impediment to the realisation of their vision. Their mission is to reconcile within a pluralist frame of reference those elements of their theory and practice that are, for whatever reason, effective. They have a head start in this endeavour. Indeed (and as noted), employees already mostly embrace pluralism and managers themselves already believe that other workplaces are, unlike their own, environments of pluralist hegemony.

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First things first: Unselfconscious corporate virtuosity and corporate performance

Abstract

Since Milton Friedman's halcyon days, business ethics scholarship has moved away from debate about whether there is a link between innate, unselfconscious (or unpublicised) corporate virtuosity and corporate performance, without really resolving the matter in any compelling way. As such, relevant scholarship now mostly addresses an array of second-order matters including, in particular, how virtuosity is, or should be, communicated. These latter topics, as consequential as they are, loose some of their urgency if corporations acting ethically without seeking credit for so doing improve their performance. This article investigates the relationship between unselfconscious corporate virtuosity and corporate performance using a novel methodology. It reveals that unselfconscious corporate virtuosity is associated with better corporate performance.

Introduction

There are two big-picture, intertwined and long-running debates in management literature concerning corporate citizenship behaviour. The first debate, broadly speaking, is about whether being perceived as ethical is best interpreted as a mostly disingenuous plan deployed for commercial advantage or is, in fact, typically instituted as genuinely altruistic (Bronn and Vrioni, 2001; Amazeen, 2011). This area of conjecture is essentially about executive commitment to corporate social responsibility and being a good corporate citizen. The second debate, once again broadly speaking, is about whether doing good leads, in and of itself, necessarily to better organisation performance. It is noteworthy that the second concern switches the focus of the debate from motivation to outcomes.

The twin conundrums of motivation and outcomes remain alive and well, mostly for methodological reasons. To understand what keeps them animated, it is instructive to reflect on the parallel enigmas concerning human morality. In the case of motivation, one age-old problem is embodied in the proposition that 'the really virtuous person is the one who does good when nobody is watching', or, as Noel Coward formulated it, 'a gentleman is the one who uses a butter knife when he dines alone.' In the case of outcomes, there are multiple axioms, such as (from Aesop) 'no act of kindness, no matter how small is ever wasted' or the contrasting adage, often attributed to Oscar Wilde, that 'no good deed goes unpunished.'

Hypotheses concerning the motivation for, and outcomes of, good corporate citizenship are, at least in certain contexts, often unfalsifiable. Insofar as the former of these (motivation) is concerned, the problem is axiomatically that to gain evidence that one is 'doing good', evidence-gathering is required. To the extent that a person is aware they either are, or might be, scrutinised, they become 'more-good'. In some circumstances, there is a way to resolve this dilemma, variants of which have been tried and reported on (Loughbron et al, 2009; Huang et al, 2014; Breuer, Knetcsh & Salzman, 2018). For example, the researcher could, at least in theory, create a paradigm where data about the 'relative goodness' of their subject is being collected surreptitiously so that a control is established for that same subject's overtly-examined exemplary acts. The idea here (and assuming some appropriately defended points of external reference) is that where the purportedly virtuous person manifests no significant difference between how decent they are when being watched versus not being so inspected, they are, in fact, an authentically good person. Creating an equivalent protocol for corporate entities is more problematic. Indeed, there are compelling reasons to believe that consequential elements of firm operations are never really secret, a point made by Breuer, Knetsch and Salzman (2018). For firms (as opposed to people), there is also additional complexity when it comes to determining what 'good' really means. This line of inquiry, which has a controversial history, finds its

modern origins in Milton Friedman's (1970) contention that firms must certainly operate legally but nonetheless do nothing more than create profit. Furthermore, for corporations, which formally (in one way or another) assign cost to their activity, doing 'undirected' good without appropriate planning is, in a sense, akin to spending money without a budget, perhaps paradoxically not so good. This matter is often glossed over in debate about the rational and justification for Corporate Social Responsibility (Banerjee, 2008; Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

Musings about what corporate goodness really is has come to be associated with various generic, and somewhat irreconcilable, positions. Protagonists in these feuds find inspiration, on the one hand, in the Kantian ideal of universal principles of virtue and, on the other, in utilitarianism, the notion that an action is justified if it maximises utility for the greatest number (Chun, 2017). This debate, as pressing as it is in other contexts, is distracting for current purposes in that reflection on the nature of virtue is not reflection on corporate virtue's consequences. Assuming that a subset of firms within a sector do more relative good than others or engage in comparatively more corporate social responsibility for whatever reason (and however defined), the second conundrum comes in to play. Namely, and to repeat, what are the innate organisational performance effects (outcomes) of doing good? In this question, the term 'innate' refers to effects that occur without any deliberate effort to draw attention to them being carried out.

In this article, a new perspective of how to assess an elemental feature of firm ethical conduct is presented and road-tested with data from Fortune-500 firms. The new perspective invokes the notion of transparency, a word which appeared in the management lexicon in the 1960s but, as far as the current authors can tell, has not been well capitalised upon by those wrestling with conceptions of corporate honesty and how such conceptions are manifest. Certainly, the construct has not been operationalised in the way to be defended in the present study, through use of what is known in analytic philosophy circles as the analytic-synthetic

distinction. This dichotomy prescribes that, in a literal sense, truth-bearing propositions are one of two and only two kinds: analytic and synthetic (the meaning of these terms is discussed in the following pages). As will be shown, the analytic-synthetic dichotomy is well adapted to the challenge of establishing a novel measure of corporate honesty. Further, its invocation allows for new light to be shed on a debate that has become stale or at least sidelined. Specifically, the distinction is apposite to inquire into the second aforementioned dilemma, that which concerns outcomes. This matter is, for reasons to be explained, better viewed as a first-order issue when it comes to business ethics. In a nutshell, it embeds the following question: does being unselfconsciously virtuous (or virtuous without seeking credit for so-being) lead to better corporate performance?

The structure of this article is as follows. First, an overview of the intellectual history of key concepts which are used to create this study's framework is exposed. Second, the research question is formally presented. Third, the methodology for the study is described and defended. Fourth, the study's results are presented. Fifth, in the discussion and conclusion, these findings are reflected on and placed in context. Although they provide insight into what is referred to here as a first order issue (the innate corporate virtuosity – corporate performance relationship), such results should not be viewed as the last word concerning the phenomenon on which they bear.

Corporate Virtuosity and Financial Performance: A Sidetracked Debate

Debate about corporate social responsibility (CSR) has broadened over the last 50 years. In the 1970s, largely under the pen of Milton Friedman, the matter was mostly framed as pertaining to whether being virtuous was good for profit (Banerjee, 2008). However, in recent times, CSR has emerged as an imperative on its own and concern about whether it increases organisational performance has become largely inconsequential (Amazeen, 2011). Yet, the link between CSR and firm performance is a first order issue. Its side-lining is unfortunate, because

it decouples conjecture about corporate virtuosity from pressing strategic concerns, thus impeding understanding. Specifically, if it emerges that philanthropy is bad for the bottom-line, then if firm principals (or their agents, according to Freidman and his acolytes of the Chicago School[7]) decide to use an entity's prosperity to benefit other parties and, in so doing, advantage themselves, the character of CSR debate changes. As such, if doing good is not conducive to organisational performance, conjecture about its relevance is mostly deliberation about the nature of good, or righteousness (*à la* Kant versus utilitarianism, etc.), and how (when operationalised as a variable) the construct can be fully manifested. However, as things stand, the state of knowledge about the first-order issue – the innate link between unselfconscious corporate virtuosity and corporate performance[8] – is unconfirmed and not tackled head-on in relevant literature (Amazeen, 2011).

Debate about the virtuosity-performance connection has splintered in recent years. It has become somewhat derailed by concerns about the performance-related value of being perceived as corporately responsible, with the key word here being 'perceived' (Tata & Prasad, 2014). For example, there is a corpus of work addressing how entities use communication strategies to portray themselves as corporately responsible (e.g., Brammer & Pavellin, 2004; Dawkins & Nguniri, 2008; Highhouse et al., 2009; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Zadek et al., 2007, 1997). Conjecture here is focused mostly on theory development pertaining to CSR (e.g., Tata & Prassad, 2014) or more descriptive, as exemplified in contributions that compare and contrast sectors and cultures with respect to how firms represent their values and virtues (e.g., Chun,

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[7] Who assert that it is especially problematic for managers – as opposed to owners – to be flirting with Corporate Social Responsibility (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

[8] Once again, innate here referring to the effects of doing good without deliberate effort to draw attention to the purportedly good deed.

2015; Robertson & Crittenden, 2003). There is also a related sub-genre of work focusing on managerial opportunism and, specifically, how firm stewards are disposed to use language with guile and deception (e.g., Audi, Loughran & McDonald, 2016; Capalbo, et al, 2018; Breuer, Knetsch & Salzman, 2018). This latter literature mostly addressees matters of malfeasance (or potential malfeasance) in circumstances where, on the one hand, it is assumed that there are managers who manipulate for their own material advantage and, on the other hand, there are managers who are not so inclined. The construct of the unethical manager has led authors such as Breuer, Knetsch and Salzman (2018) to their general theory of truthful signalling, the idea being that language deployed in a strategically duplicitous way is detectable and predictive of certain unethical actions.

As valuable as it is, scholarship addressing the way firm stewards portray their entities and which delves into whether and how they are inclined to use language disingenuously for personal gain puts the cart before the horse. Indeed, and as noted, there is a more fundamental issue that remains unsettled, the aforementioned first-order issue. Specifically, and to introduce this article's research question, is there evidence that merely being more corporately ethical in the absence of concern about being so perceived enhances hard-core measures of corporate performance? To answer this question, established constructs from disparate literature will be invoked in a new combination. These disparate constructs are (from the management ethics and corporate governance literature) 'transparency' and (from the realm principally of analytic philosophy) the 'analytic-synthetic distinction.'

Transparency and Corporate Reporting

Theorising about the nature of corporate transparency is traceable to the early 1960s and the work of Coser (1961). Somewhat redundantly (and cryptically), she observed that, insofar as stakeholder management is concerned, a low visibility situation permits one to hold private attitudes that are reflected in behaviour that is not observed by peers. Whatever its inadequacies,

Coser's view of the phenomenon has been influential. Indeed, it sparked two partially overlapping themes in subsequent literature addressing (mostly) non-financial transparency, with some of the obscurity of her original contribution lingering on in each of these strands.

The first of the aforementioned themes emphasises that transparency has a causally prior direct or explicit role to play in creating, maintaining, or repairing stakeholder trust *vis-à-vis* a particular entity (Akkermans, Bogerd & van Doremalen, 2004; Fleischmann & Wallace, 2005; Pirson & Malhotra, 2011; Rawlins, 2008). The second is conjecture about indirect or implicit links between corporate candour and generic confidence that an entity is fundamentally good as embodied in such virtues as honesty, commitment to widespread benefit and selflessness. Contributions to this second theme are reflected in the writings of authors such as Bansal and Kistruck (2006), Bhat, Hope and Kang (2006), Bushman, Piotroski and Smith (2004), Leuz and Oberholzer-Gee (2006) as well as Perotti and von Thadden (2005). In their musings, these scholars do not necessarily use the term trust but rather often refer to proxy measures such as 'confidence,' 'respect,' 'high regard,' etc. In spite of such terminological fuzziness, there is a degree of consensus amongst authors from disparate backgrounds writing about corporate transparency. Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) capture the essence of the agreement when, in talking about the private sector, they conclude that it (transparency) is, in one way or another, an antecedent to a firm's trustworthiness, a precursor (according to the same authors, as well as others) for a raft of other attributes that comprise ethical corporate conduct.

There are three strands of literature that have an applied focus in the quest to obtain corporate transparency. These strands mostly give advice to practitioners, but typically neglect to provide theoretical foundations for such counsel.

First, some authors propose that the benefits of being more corporately transparent are modulated through enhancing the relationship between a firm and its stakeholders (Berggren & Bernshteyn, 2007; Bernstein, 2012; Christmann, 2004; Larsson et al., 1998). For instance,

scholars such as Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) have argued that transparency is a precondition for trust, in particular, which in turn causes better firm performance as revealed through orthodox – often financial – indicators. Writing on the specific relationship between these variables, researchers including Khurana et al. (2006) found that, in a comparative sense, US firms which demonstrate greater disclosure, achieve higher growth and lower cost of capital. Similarly, Biddle and Hilary (2006) have revealed that firms which disclose more, exhibit greater entity-level investment efficiency. Overall, research mostly indicates that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), when coupled with circumscribed transparency protocols, contributes to a firm's competitive advantage for creating 'shared value' (Porter & Kramer, 2011). These protocols achieve such outcomes through influencing stakeholders' behaviours, with small, medium and large associations (correlations) having been found between CSR and financial performance (Barnett, 2007; Bosse, Phillips & Harrison, 2009; Margolis, Elfenbein & Walsh, 2007; Orlitzky, Schmidt & Rynes, 2003). This corpus of literature is, in some respects, a contribution to the aforementioned first-order issue, but only to the very limited extent that it deemphasises corporate impression management (which it mostly does not).

Second, there is the hypothesis that transparency plays a specialised role in creating employee commitment. Here again, trust is a focal construct but has a narrow instantiation, being applied to the case of employees rather than generically to an array of consequential stakeholders (Mayer, Davis & Shoorman, 1995). Work in this genre makes an even more indirect contribution to the first-order issue, mostly providing almost no insight into the matter. For example, trust has been linked to outcomes such as workforce satisfaction (Edwards & Cable, 2009; Gulati & Sytch, 2007), enhanced effort and performance (Aryee, Budhwar & Chen, 2002; Jason, Scott & Lepine, 2007), citizenship behavior (Mayer & Gavin, 2005' Walumbwa et al., 2011), collaboration and teamwork (Sargent & Waters, 2004; Simons & Person, 2000), leadership effectiveness (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Gillespie & Mann, 2004), buy-

in to prevailing human resource management protocols (Graham & Lindsay, 2006) and negotiation success (Lee, Yang & Graham; 2006; Olekalns & Smith, 2007). A landmark study about trust as applied to people management is from Rawlins (2008), the conclusion of which is that employees, when reflecting on the way other firm stakeholders conduct themselves, are more influenced by elements such as integrity and goodwill than, for example, competency.

Third, there is literature addressing transparency as it pertains to the specific case of Environmental Social Governance (ESG) reporting, once again conspicuously silent on the first-order issue mostly because it overtly does not address unselfconscious corporate virtuosity. Within this corpus, the contention is typically that good domain-relevant performance (including ESG disclosure) yields improved return for a firm's owners (McKinsey, 2020).

In summary, extant literature addressing corporate reporting transparency typically emphasises that improvement in this area is broadly desirable. The benefits of being better at it apply to stakeholders including investors and financiers (Khurana, Pereira & Xiumin. 2006; Francis et al., 2009; Chipalkatti, Le & Rishi, 2007: Biddle & Gilles, 2006), employees (Rawlins, 2008), policy makers and regulators, customers as well as community interest groups which have more oblique associations with a firm or industry (Dubbink, Graafland & Van Liedekerke, 2008; Losada-Otálora & Alkire, 2019). As such, it seems that, in 2022, few argue against the proposition that being committed to comprehensive and representative formal disclosure in reporting documents is the right thing to do. However, aside from any consideration of being perceived as such, insofar as the commercial innate value of being transparent is concerned, as things stand, the case is weak that higher levels of ethical conduct do in fact lead to improved organisational performance, the first-order issue.

When it comes to being precise about what transparency is, at least as the term is deployed in literature addressing corporate reporting and disclosure, the analyst is confronted with an initial methodological challenge. The word itself refers to an attribute of a relationship between

two parties. Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) captured the substance of how authors in the area conceive of it when they define it as "the perceived quality of shared information from a sender". This understanding of the term is broad and somewhat equivocal. Specifically, the fact that although (and as noted) relevant parties attach value to the construct, management literature unpackaging its focal sub-components is often woolly (Schnackenberg, Tomlinson & Corinne Coen, 2020). Such a concern has plagued relevant scholarship, and possibly explains why there is a dearth of empirical research on the matter (Bernstein, 2017; Kaptein, 2008; Pirson & Malhotra, 2011; Rawlins, 2008; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Relatedly, there is a paucity of reliable and well validated measures of transparency (Albu & Flyverbom. 2019; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). Indeed, some purported metrics of the phenomenon have delivered discrepant findings (Rawlins, 2008; Pirson & Malhotra, 2011). In drawing a conclusion about this matter, Bernstein (2017: 217) notes that "measuring transparency – a critical part of empirically demonstrating its instrumental value – has proven extremely elusive". In a larger sense, Bernstein's concern is emblematic of the issue at the heart of this article, namely: does innate or unselfconscious virtuosity result in better organisational performance?

Notwithstanding overall problems concerning under-development of operational definitions and lack of solid variables and measures and a general lack of empirical research, there have been attempts to pin-down the substance of what it means to be corporately transparent. For example, following a large-scale meta-analysis, Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) concluded that literature-based portrayals typically entail a mix of three elements: (i) perceived disclosure (the extent to which information is judged to be released rather than hidden), (ii) perceived clarity (the extent to which information is judged to be understandable rather than obfuscated), and (iii) perceived accuracy (the extent to which information is judged to be reflective of reality rather than exaggerated, biased or beset by crucial omissions). Others have noted that isolating and measuring the sub-components of transparency is as elusive an

enterprise as measuring the construct itself (Albu & Flyverbom, 2019; Ananny & Crawford, 2018; Bernstein, 2017). However, recent work has heralded progress. Specifically, Schnackenberg et al. (2020) used factor analysis to reveal that corporate transparency is underpinned by three independent subordinate elements: disclosure, clarity and accuracy. In a parallel line of innovation, Kaptein (2008) as well as Kim and Lee (2012) have proposed and defended surveys for indexing these constructs.

In a nutshell, insofar as variables and measures are concerned, there is an emerging consensus about transparency. Specifically, to say that a corporate communication or one of its sections is transparent is to invoke the notion that its text (i.e., its words and phraseology) connects an author with a reader such that the reader becomes informed (or more informed) in a particularised way of a relevant content scope. The idea of 'a particularised way' embraces to varying degrees notions of balance, comparability, accuracy, timeliness, clarity, reliability (Belén, Romero & Luiz, 2013), relevance (Williams, 2005), truthfulness, objectivity, comprehensibility, understandability (Rawlins, 2008), as well as completeness, inclusivity, verifiability, impartiality and consistency (Dubbink, Graafland & Van Liedekerke, 2008). For current purposes, this view collapses into three elementary sub-components: completeness (everything that must be disclosed is disclosed), clarity (content is conveyed without ambiguity) and propositional representativeness (content is propositionally representative of reality, i.e., is factual). In enhancing their awareness, the goal of readers is to advance their interests through making improved investment decisions or, at least, be better poised to act in ways that are compatible with their personal priorities and values.

In the corporate world, the issue of transparency is most germane in communications that are conveyed through language as instantiated in its written form. Although such exchanges cannot be scrutinised outside of their cultural and role-based contexts, assessing whether disclosure has been successful is essentially an exercise in making a judgment concerning

language use (and misuse). As such, to make progress on effectiveness in the arena of corporate disclosure, as it is the case with financial-related disclosure where words and phraseology are the subject of stringent and probing scrutiny (Li & Haque, 2019; Hesarzadeh & Rajabalizadeh, 2019), language (and its application) should be the focus. However, applications of principles of linguistics as a means of assessing efficacy are rare in relevant literature (with exceptions being Verk, Golob & Podnar, 2019; Crane & Glozer, 2016; Golob, et al, 2013; Nielson & Thomsen, 2012).

The Analytic-Synthetic Distinction

The analytic-synthetic distinction is a theory about language use with medieval origins, notably in the writing of luminaries such as William of Ockham (Ayer, 1971). In the contemporary world, the dichotomy forms part of the tool kit of analytic philosophers in particular. Furthermore, linguists and psychologists apply it routinely (Schwartz, 2012). Indeed, in such disciplines, technical and more philosophical criticisms of it have been convincingly rebutted (Horwich, 1992). At least insofar as literal language use is concerned, in its most elementary formulation, the theory prescribes that meaningful propositions are of two and only two kinds: analytic and synthetic.

An analytic statement is one that, despite sometimes being well disguised as a verifiable proposition about the nature of reality, is essentially tautological. The truth of this kind assertion (sometimes also called *a priori* or formal statements) is manifest because of the meaning (or at least the conventional usage) of the terms that compose it and prevailing linguistic protocols. 'All large dogs are canines,' 'a right-angle has 90 degrees,' 'submarines travel under water,' 'my friend likes me' or 'she is a pregnant mother-to-be' are straightforward examples. In mathematics, conceptual redundancy is easily discerned. Specifically, to say that 'the square root of sixteen equals four' is tantamount to saying that 'four times four equals sixteen'. Insofar as management-related subject matter is concerned, the following affirmation is analytic:

"charismatic leaders are influential" (Bartone, 2010). In this example, the word charisma, according to conventional usage, is the ability to influence people.

By their nature, analytic propositions are unfalsifiable. In practice, this means that their truth status does not rest on (and can therefore be established independently of) experience. Again from the management literature, the statement "a poorly managed organization […] may soar" (Bolman & Deal, 2008: viii) is analytic because the verb form 'may' (variant: might) incorporates, as a possible outcome, that what is proposed will not materialise and in fact its antithesis will. Furthermore, the formal truth of the actual assertion is preserved without there even being such a thing as a poorly managed organisation. Sentences relying on the verb form 'can' or 'could' are also unavoidably analytic because, in a literal sense, they are a delivery means for propositions that cannot be disconfirmed by experience. For example (from the corporate reporting literature), the statement "Offset requirements […] can be used for compliance with an emissions reduction program" (ConocoPhillips, 2019) is analytic. In invoking the word 'can', it implicitly specifies a universe of two possible resultant manifestations but indicates no substantive predictions (even in qualitative probabilistic terms through use of adverbs like "probably" or "likely") concerning which of these will occur. For practical purposes, the reader of such a sentence merely becomes aware that offset requirements will, or will not, achieve compliance. All incoming evidence bearing on the proposition will be compatible with it. However, this would not be the case if the statement were in the negative. For instance, 'Offset requirements cannot be used for compliance with an emissions reduction program' is not analytic because the emergence of one counterexample suffices to render it as false.

A synthetic statement is a testable (and thus falsifiable) proposition about the nature of reality. Such propositions are distinguishable from analytic ones because their truth status rests exclusively on empirical verification, in other words, on evidence that an interested party goes

out and finds. For example, whether 'there are black swans' or 'there are two cars in the garage' is only known following relevant inquiry (or, at a minimum, a report from a credible secondary source that has undertaken primary research). These kinds of hypotheses are not settled through securing interlocutor agreement about the usage (working definitions) of terms they contain and verifying that words and phraseology respect grammatical rules. Rather, synthetic statements are judged as being either true or false based on external points of reference. In most circumstances, finding relevant indicators is tantamount to 'looking to see.' However, for the executive describing their firm, verification is inevitably more formal, typically taking the form of an enquiry process and ensuing evidence collation.

Synthetic statements do not manifest an internal logic which becomes irrefutable when there is consensus about word meanings. Although they are subject to correction and elaboration when new evidence becomes available, their antithesis does not entail a logical contradiction. For example (again from the corporate reporting literature), "ConocoPhillips was […] the first exploration and production company to set a long-term GHG intensity reduction target" (ConocoPhillips, 2019) is manifestly testable and, as such, synthetic.

Several consequences of the analytic-synthetic distinction are relevant to executives seeking to improve corporate transparency. First, from analytic statements, only other analytic statements logically follow. This principle is at the heart of what it means to say that nothing is added to disclosure when a series of ideas is derived from a tautology. In the late 1950s, Doris Day reminded her fans of this truism when she sung '*que sera, sera*' ('whatever will be, will be'), but pointedly did not then let them know that 'personal effort is of no use'. Indeed, the latter proposition is synthetic and does not flow from the song's name, which is an analytic statement.

Another practitioner-relevant consequence of embracing the analytic-synthetic distinction is recognition that there is no *a priori* knowledge of reality because no proposition is

simultaneously analytic and synthetic. An implication here is, to reify, that is, to deal with an abstraction as if it were a tangible entity (for example to say that 'an idea is going to fly'), is unjustified because it represents an attempt to bridge the analytic-synthetic divide. Further, powers, physical qualities or concrete properties are assignable to tangible entities but not abstract ones. As such, ideas do not have these attributes; only those individuals who hold them do. Insofar as corporate reporting is concerned, reification obscures personal responsibility. Specifically, although incorporated entities have independent existence for legal and accounting purposes, reification ascribes to firms human-type agency of a kind that creates ambiguity concerning the actual origin of action and thus of responsibility. For example, to say that "Occidental has made a series of commitments during the past years" smuggles in the impression that it is possible for non-human entities to make such a pledge (Occidental Petroleum, 2020). In practice, this declaration pre-emptively exonerates the firm's management (or shareholders or employees or others – take your pick!) if things do not go as planned.

Although reifications and the ambiguities they create have not received sustained attention in the business ethics and corporate reporting literature, they are regarded as a serious matter in other contexts. Indeed, in such disciplines as analytic philosophy, psychology and sociology, those committed to the analytic-synthetic distinction sometimes adopt a position known as nominalism (Rodriguez-Pereyra, 2019). Nominalists expunge language of those expressions that do not refer to experience and prefer concrete to abstract nouns. For instance, they do not believe there are such 'things' as memory, organisations or personality, for these terms are abstractions and thus subject to shifting interpretations. Instead, nominalists speak of things they remember, people who affiliate in specific ways with circumscribed groups and elemental observable behaviours.

The analytic-synthetic distinction is not relevant to all language use and is restricted in its application in specific ways. For example, propositions that cannot be designated as either

analytic or synthetic cannot have their truth status ascertained and hence be relied upon to convey meaningful content. They are, at least insofar as the distinction is concerned, meaningless statements. This label, no more than 50 years old, which is perhaps narrow-minded, is Ayer's (1971). Expressions like 'metaphors' or even 'poetry' are in some cases possible alternatives to such derisory labelling. Indeed, conceiving of a proposition as metaphoric or poetic in the context of being unable to classify it as either analytic or synthetic draws attention to the fact that it conveys a different kind of meaning, for example one concerning moral, artistic or existential content. 'I love you,' 'People who live in glass houses should not throw stones' or 'Frailty, thy name is woman' do not qualify as either analytic or synthetic. They are nonetheless, in various ways, evocative. Other such statements include terminologically, grammatically or logically incoherent pronouncements, accounts referring to fictional, intangible or unobservable entities (such as feelings or psychological events), oxymora, moral norms and judgements (i.e., those implying or relying on verb forms such as 'should' or 'must'), expressions of desire or hope, etc. In sum, the third category of statement (henceforth referred to as residual in this article) do not necessitate, as a prerequisite for understanding, either application of logic or collation of experience. It is noteworthy that no analytic or synthetic statement derives from a residual proposition.

Another delimiting feature of the analytic-synthetic distinction is that, when embraced, it commits the writer to using words and phraseology literally and non-equivocally. Insofar as corporate disclosure is concerned, executives with reporting responsibilities who take seriously the distinction assume a threshold level of agreement concerning meaning between themselves and their intended readers. Of course, corporate language is sometimes used metaphorically. In such circumstances, consideration of culture and context typically assist to clarify. For example, to say 'returns this high are as rare as hens' teeth' is, in a technical sense, a synthetic statement in that it is theoretically possible to count how many hens' teeth exist (and – perhaps after

making a few assumptions – express the outcome as a proportion) and contrast the resultant value with the probability of a stated return. However, such an exercise is clearly not what is being called for. Rather, creating meaning from the statement entails reflection on elements other than the analytic-synthetic distinction. Indeed, in a larger sense, this delimiting feature draws attention to Friedman's (2018) point that people have capacity to make sense of the world in idiosyncratic and ethereal ways.

Research Question Restated

Scholarly as well as practitioner-based literature addressing corporate transparency indicates, albeit often vaguely, that improvement in this area is ethically desirable. Further, the same literature portrays transparency as a proxy measure of corporate honesty, which, according to Chun (2019), is the foundation of corporate virtuosity. However, as noted, debate about the virtuosity-performance link – the aforementioned first-order issue – has been marginalised. Indeed, it has been eclipsed by concerns such as how to be transparent, how to best showcase good works and how industries and cultures differ with respect to their CSR-type priorities and initiatives, unambiguously second-order considerations. As such, as important as they are, the relevance of these latter matters diminishes if there is no implicit connection between being virtuous and performing well on standard corporate metrics. In light of such reflection, this study revisits the virtuosity-performance association using a new methodology. Its research question (restated) is: is there evidence that merely being more corporately ethical in the absence of concern about being so-perceived enhances hardcore measures of organisational performance?

Methodology and Hypothesis

According to Perrini (2006: 73), a non-financial disclosure document is a report "published to complete the corporate economic portrait by adding a social and environmental dimension". The present study borrows Perrini's conception to answer its research question. Specifically,

the non-financial corporate disclosure documents of firms listed on the Fortune-500 'top 1000' ranking list of America's largest companies are taken as a representative sample of how good American firms deal with the imperative of transparency.[9] The majority of the 1000 listed firms publish at least one substantial and formal non-financial disclosure document each year (sometimes this document forms part of an annual report or compliance-related publication).

In most Western countries, elaborated non-financial disclosure documents are not obligatory; however, in recent years, they have become orthodoxy (Chatterji & Levine, 2006). Such documents vary along several dimensions. Some are longer than others. Some present tables and charts whereas others rely more on language and text-based portrayals. It is also the case that, within limits, content differs between reports. In practice, this often indicates differing corporate priorities. Perrini (2006) captured the essence of this diversity when he reviewed non-financial disclosure documents and concluded that such material is broadly of one of two kinds, classified on the basis of its target audience. First, there are 'monitoring' documents (designed for internal use), reporting quantitative data strictly concerning the measurable impacts of business activities. Second, 'managerial' documents are intended to be read by a broad audience of external stakeholders. These reports are usually structured in three sections based on sphere of activity, social, environmental and economic. Introductions for each kind of document typically claim that the ensuing report has been written pursuant to stakeholder-engagement. The idea is that readers (stakeholders) will be provided evidence that the firm on which they are reflecting goes about its business in a way that embraces their values and priorities (Perrini,

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[9] The term 'Fortune 500' refers to a list of 1000 of the largest companies in the United States compiled by *Forbes* magazine every year. Companies are ranked by their annual revenues for their respective fiscal years.

2006). The focus of the current study is managerial reports, which, to repeat, are written for disparate external audiences.

To test the hypothesis that better performing firms are typically innately (i.e., without their executives being self-consciously concerned with being so perceived) more corporately ethical, syntheticity of written language is used as a proxy measure of ethical conduct. Such a measure is justified on the basis of a causal chain that, despite having several links, is well-established in disparate contributions. This chain is presented in Figure 1. Specifically, it is as follows (and as explained): syntheticity indexes transparency, transparency implies auditability, auditability signals honesty (and is thus shunned by dishonest brokers) and honesty underlies (is the basis for) other corporate virtues (Bansal & Kistruck, 2006; Bhat, Hope & Kang, 2006, Bushman, Piotoski & Smith, 2004; Leuz & Oberholzer-Gee, 2006). In summary, syntheticity of language use is a reasonable measure of unselfconscious corporate virtue.
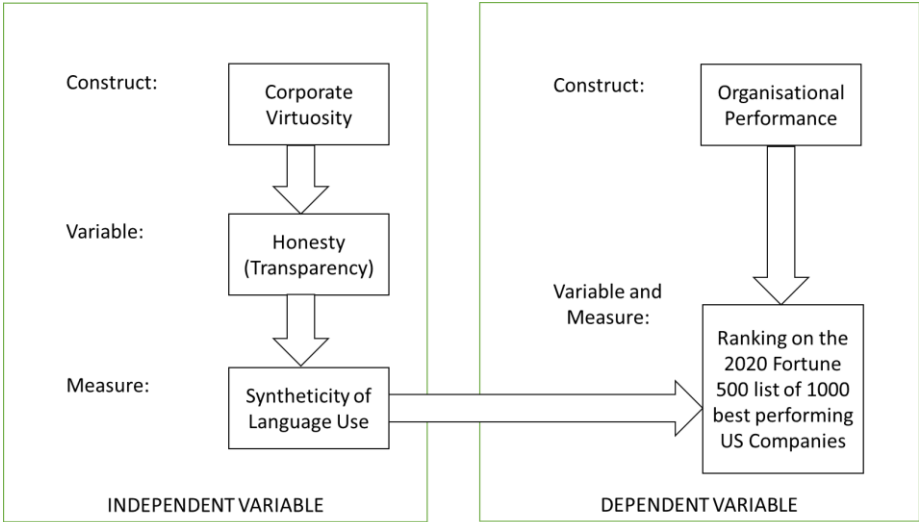

Figure 1: Constructs, Variables and Measures used in this study

In practice, if this study's null hypothesis is rejected, the conclusion will be that well performing firms (dependent variable) use a greater proportion of synthetic statements in their

reporting documents (measure, independent variable) and thus are more virtuous (construct, independent variable) than those that are less will performing.[10] To test the hypothesis, a sample of companies from the Fortune 500's ranking of the largest 1000 (2020) was analysed. To control (at least partially) for possible variation in reporting between industries, the sample was drawn from entities within a single sector. The industries selected were from 'Mining, Crude Oil Production.' Non-financial disclosure reports on sustainability and environmental activities were chosen specifically for analysis. This identified sector and the content of reports surveyed (sustainability and environmental activities) were selected for four reasons.

- First, mining and oil extraction and refining operations are controversial industries and come under more frequent critical public scrutiny than other sectors (Belén, Romero & Ruiz, 2013). Furthermore, there has been recent contentious sector-related changes for these spheres of commercial endeavour. Such change has emphasised sector self-regulation and thus heightened the transparency imperative. Specifically, on 2 November 2017 the USA withdrew, as an implementing country, from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative which accounts for "open and accountable management of oil, gas, and mineral resources" (EITI, 2017). As a result, American oil, gas and mining companies have greater discretion in what they disclose about their access to domestic natural resources.

- Second, oil companies were amongst the first firms to attach priority to reporting about the environmental consequences of their operations. As such, they are likely to have had time to establish themselves as archetypal exemplars of a spectrum of language use

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[10] With the variable intervening between the construct and the measure being transparency-auditability (the logic being that, according to Tabachnick & Fidell (2013), operationalisation of a construct entails moving from that construct to a variable to a measure).

manifestations in corporate reporting documents (Belén, Romero & Ruiz, 2013; Aerts & Cormier, 2009; Campbell, 2003; Deegan & Gordon, 1996).

- Third, firms within the selected sector typically produce similarly structured reports on their Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) activities, being influenced by international and US (ESG) protocols (which are not mandated) on this matter.[11] However, despite such structural similarity, firms within the chosen sector unambiguously report on what they do (or do not do) and reveal (or not) their priorities using a plethora of different language styles.

- Fourth, the Mining, Oil extraction and refining industries and Gas sectors are mostly comprised of firms with roughly equivalent frequencies in each of the four quartiles of the 1000 best American firms. Such within-quartile frequencies are determined by annual revenue for the fiscal year under scrutiny, in the present case 2019.

Using a broad inclusion criterion, 27 firms from the selected sector existed on the 2020 Fortune 500 list of the 1000 best performing U.S. companies (n=27). The distribution of these firms across four quartiles is indicated in Table 1. A stratified random sampling strategy was used to select entities for analysis (the strata being the quartiles and random sampling occurring within each of these with approximately a third of firms being selected within each quartile). The size outcome (n) of this sampling strategy is also depicted in Table 1.

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[11] The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), a non-profit organization, provides firms with a sustainability reporting framework that is widely used around the world, the Sustainability Accounting Standards Boards (SASB); the IPIECA's (formerly known as the International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association) provides comparable guidelines.

Table 1: Stratified Random Sampling Strategy Used for Selecting Firms to be Analysed

Fortune 500 Quartiles	Total Number of Firms within the Sector* (Mining, Oil & Gas)	Sample of Firms Analysed (one third randomly selected from each quartile or strata)
1	N=3	n=1
2	N=7	n=2
3	N=8	n=3
4	N=9	n=3
Total:	**N=27**	**n=9**

Selected from Fortune 500 ranking of America's 1000 largest companies (2020)

Table 2 presents names and rankings (on the top 1000 list) of firms identified for analysis using the stratified random sample strategy depicted in Table 1 (i.e., the names and rankings of firms identified in the third column of Table 1).

Table 2: Names and Rankings of Firms identified for Analysis Using Stratified Random Sampling

Fortune 500 Quartiles	Fortune 500 Firm Ranking*	Firms (Mining, Oil & Gas)
1	93	ConocoPhillips
2	373	Chesapeake Energy
	419	Devon Energy
3	582	Peabody Energy

	625	Murphy Oil
	608	Antero Resources
4	821	Range Resources
	969	Oasis Petroleum
	974	Cabot Oil & Gas

Selected from Fortune 500 ranking of America's 1000 largest companies (2020)

Each of the nine firms selected for scrutiny produced an ESG or Sustainability Report within the past two years. An examination of these documents provides a like-for-like opportunity to observe each of the nine's use of synthetic statements in 'equivalent' sections. Such 'equivalent' sections were:

(i)   the CEO's Introduction to the report;

(ii)   paragraphs dealing with environmental impact, strategies pertaining more generally to the environment or performance concerning protection of the environment.

Statements or text excluded from analysis were:

(iii)   detailed tables, breakout boxes, headers, joining sentences;

(iv)   statements addressing activities prior to 2018.

In total 1,837 statements from reports identified in Tables 1 and 2 were analysed.

Table 3: Summary of Statements Analysed

Fortune 500 Quartiles	Fortune 500 Firm Ranking*	Firms (Mining, Oil & Gas)	Report Statements Analysed
1	93	Conoco Phillips	n=423

Q1 Total			**n=423**
Statements:			
2	373	Chesapeake Energy	n=68
	419	Devon Energy	n=323
Q2 Total			**n=391**
Statements:			
3	582	Peabody Energy	n=113
	625	Murphy Oil	n=222
	608	Antero Resources	n=263
Q3 Total			**n=598**
Statements:			
4	821	Range Resources	n=233
	969	Oasis Petroleum	n=151
	974	Cabot Oil & Gas	n=41
Q4 Total			**n=425**
Statements:			
TOTAL			
STATEMENTS:			**n=1,837**
(all quartiles)			

*Selected from Fortune 500 ranking of America's 1000 largest companies (2020)

Insofar as how statements were analysed is concerned, to classify a proposition as analytic, synthetic or residual entails, as a matter of orthodoxy, taking that proposition at face value, in its strict literal sense. Focal content for each document identified for analysis was read by each of this study's authors and, on a sentence by sentence basis, classified as being either analytic, synthetic or residual. Where one of the authors of the study was uncertain about how to classify

a sentence or whether to view it as comprising more than one proposition, agreement was reached collegially.

Results

Figure 2, a histogram, presents this study's results. It indicates that sampled firms within the top end of the performance distribution have a higher proportion of synthetic statements in their disclosure documents than sampled firms within the lower end. For purposes of inference-making, an ANOVA analysis (using the proportion protocol) was undertaken on data. The resultant F-ratio was found to be significant ($F_{8,221}=3.765$, $p \leq 0.027$). Both *Bonferoni* adjusted (*a priori*) and *Schefee* (*post hoc*) tests reveal that individual data-points (for each indicated bar) are significant (with the exception being the bar for firm #974). It is noteworthy that differential sample sizes (with n values varying by less than 20% across quartiles) for each firm considered show acceptably small variances for the aforementioned analyses. What this analysis boils down to is that the null hypothesis is rejected using an orthodox threshold criterion. In lay terms, it is generally true that more successful firms produce non-financial disclosure documents that contain a higher proportion of synthetic statements than less successful firms. As such, executives presiding over more successful firms typically are unabashedly more honest and straightforward in how they portray their entities than those administering less well performing firms.

Figure 2: Percentage (%) of Synthetic Statements in Sample Firms' Non-financial Disclosure Documents presented for Individual Firms
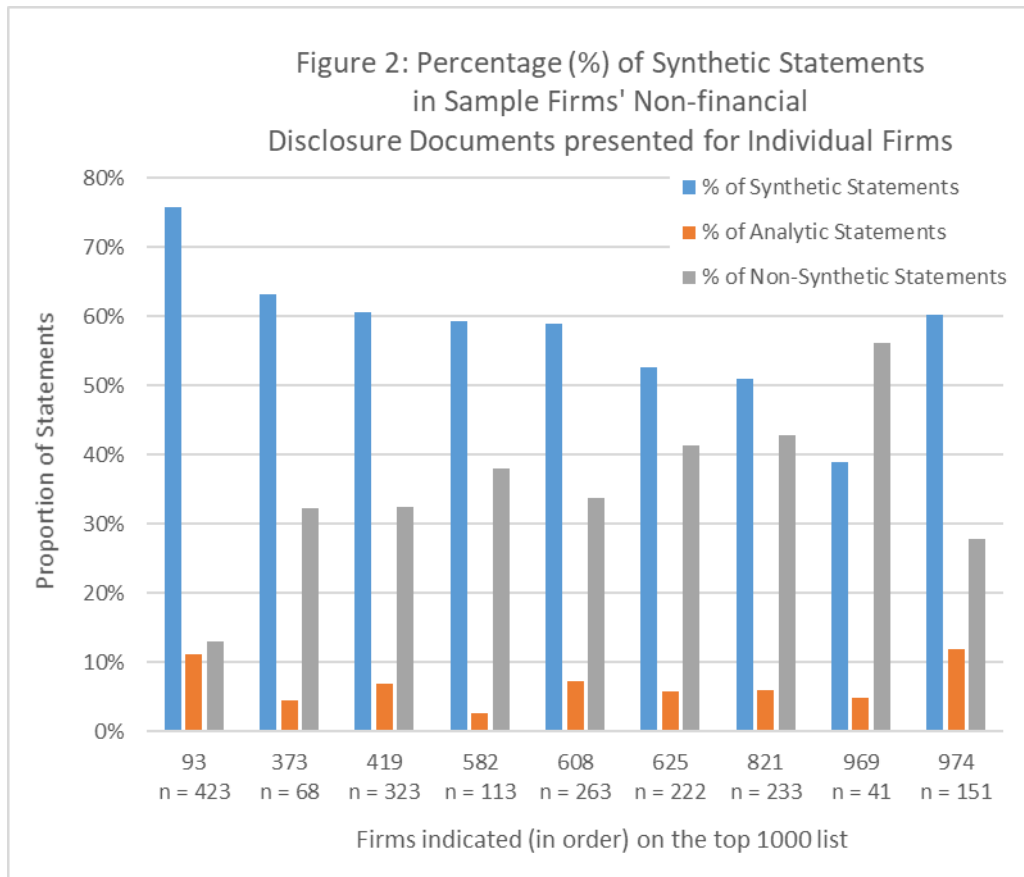
Figure 3 presents the same analysis as Figure 2 in aggregated form. Specifically, rather than depicting results for individual firms, it displays findings for the four quartiles of the top-1000 firms. Such a depiction has the effect of disguising the outlier effect resulting from inclusion of firm #974 in the sample.

Figure 3: Percentage (%) of Synthetic Statements in Sample Firms' Non-financial Disclosure Documents presented (in aggregate for each of four quartiles)
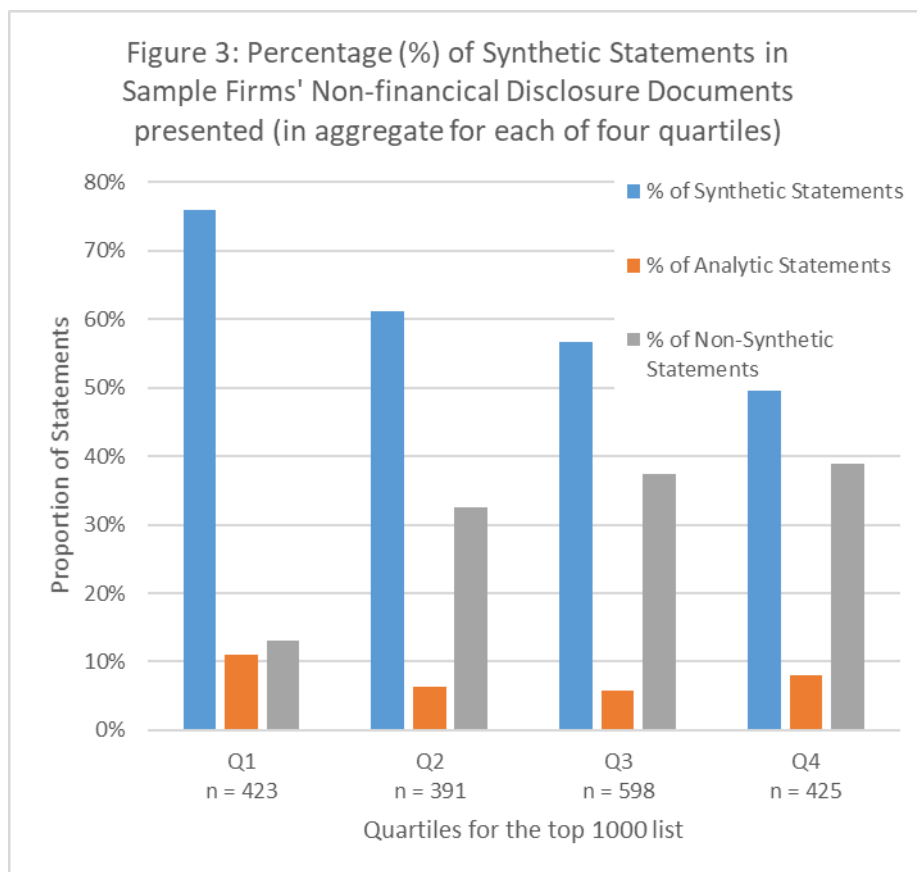
Following data collation and presentation, the case of firm #974 (the outlier result) was further examined. When compared to the other eight entities comprising the sample (across each of the four quartiles), company #974 (*Cabot's Oil & Gas*) was found to have the highest average annual growth (of at least 20% across three years) in revenue and earnings per share up to 30 April 2020. Furthermore, it was the only company in the Mining, Oil and Gas sector (when all firms in the sector are considered) to achieve this revenue growth, earning it a place on Fortune 500's other list, the 100 Fastest Growing Companies in 2020.[12] In light of such collateral insights, it is concluded that, although *Cabot's Oil & Gas* is classified as a 4th quartile performing firm on the top-1000 list, this portrayal belies its intrinsic worth. Specifically, the ranking for this firm is reconcilable with rejection of the null hypothesis. As such, it

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[12] See https://fortune.com/100-fastest-growing-companies/

underestimates the performance of its management group and is a credible explanation for its outlier status as a high-proportion user of synthetic statements in disclosure documents.

Initial reflection on the first-order issue

This study's results reveal that successful firms are distinguishable from others on the basis that they use a higher proportion of synthetic statements in their reporting and disclosure documents, at least for the generic elements of such documents (i.e., their introductions and commentary concerning the environmental consequences of their operations). Prior to interpreting what this means (and, crucially, what it means for the aforementioned first-order issue concerning unselfconscious or innate corporate virtuosity and performance), two caveats and associated commentaries are presented. These matters can be also viewed as (generic) technical criticisms of the current study's method. Conceptual criticisms of the study are discussed in the next section.

First, as noted, only one sector was scrutinised in this study. Mining, Crude Oil and Gas industries were selected because, largely owing to the nature of their activities, they have an image problem. Indeed, they have been regularly handcuffed to claims that their executives act with guile and duplicity in advancing corporate interests (Cahn, 1995). As such, insofar as this sector addresses the problem of reporting, it is more likely than others to reveal consequential variance in its disclosure protocols, specifically to have the full gamut of good and bad performers within its ranks. In this sense, the Mining, Crude Oil and Gas industries sector can be contrasted with, for example, others that have an explicit environmental agenda such as those focusing on development and roll-out of renewable energy.

Second, setting aside the sector being analysed, a case can be made that insufficient firms were sampled. Certainly, to identify sample values for comparator cells of fewer than four (i.e., for each quartile less than four firms were retained for analysis) renders statistical inference non-feasible. However, this problem evaporates when the object of analytic interest switches

from firms to statements made within disclosure documents. Such a shift creates a state where, within each quartile, hundreds of data points are revealed, unleashing a wealth of insight.

What emerges from this study is a portrait of the way successful, as contrasted with less successful, firm executives communicate in writing about their activities and priorities. Further reflection on what a synthetic statement entails is useful for interpreting this finding. Specifically, synthetic propositions have hallmarks of unselfconscious honesty and authenticity that are not associated with either analytic or residual statements. The reason is that, when properly constructed, synthetic propositions are simultaneously subject to empirical scrutiny (i.e., able to be falsified) and have an unambiguous temporal dimension (i.e., they entail a sense-based specification that either manifested at a point in the past or will do so in the future). For example, to say that "from 2005 to 2017, energy-related carbon dioxide emissions decreased 14%" (Chesapeake Energy, 2018) is a synthetic statement that, at least in principle, entails protocols for determining whether it is an honest portrayal. To say that "we set a goal of […] reducing our GHG intensity by 10% by 2025" (Antero Resources, 2020) is an equivalent statement about the future that similarly comes with verification protocols. In each case, something of substance is being conveyed and, when such statements create an orthodoxy, the reader – who now in one way or another is able to do an operational audit of claims being made - gains confidence in those doing the communicating. By contrast, statements such as "a well-designed carbon price would reduce emissions", or "we aim to track the pace and direction of the energy transition and identify potential leading indicators of change in the demand for hydrocarbons" (ConocoPhillips, 2019) are (often poorly) disguised analytic statements. These kinds of propositions, henceforth referred to as 'veiled' (thinly or thickly, depending on the deciphering effort required for their unmasking) are insidious examples of non-synthetic statements because they have a misleading quality. In this sense, they are able to be contrasted with overtly (unveiled) analytic statements such as "Medium-term risks take longer to impact

our business [than short-term risks]"; ConocoPhillis, 2019). This latter pronouncement, although perhaps irritating to read, is readily dismissible as platitudinal. It does not hurt anyone to say it but, in circumstances where such kinds of statements are used repeatedly, a reader perception emerges that stewards, at least, do not know where they are going or how they are going to get there or, in more serious cases, are being disingenuous. Table 4 formally presents the aforementioned classification system and gives examples from corporate reports of its manifestations. **NB:** The decomposition presented in Table 4 does not imply that the analytic-synthetic distinction is not a true dichotomy. Rather, it indicates that, when examining (for example) those propositions that are analytic, some are easier to spot as such.

Table 4: Examples Statements and their Classifications

Kind of Proposition	Example	
Synthetic with clear temporal contingency	"from 2005 to 2017, energy-related carbon dioxide emissions decreased 14%" (Chesapeake Energy). "we set a goal of […] reducing our GHG intensity by 10% by 2025" (Antero Resources).	**Most transparent**
Synthetic with unclear temporal contingency (not clear whether it was done or will be done)	"Every year, we refine our processes to save even more energy" (LCI Industries).	
Analytic – thickly-veiled	"To continuously improve our environmental performance, we're proactive and action-oriented" (Devon Energy).	

Analytic – thinly-veiled	"Our pursuit of safety in our operations is never complete; we never consider our performance to be good enough" (Chesapeake Energy). "[our scenarios] do not, and cannot, describe all possible future outcomes" (Conoco Phillips).
Analytic – unveiled (obvious tautology or several reasons to classify it as analytic)	"Medium-term risks […] may include emerging policy that is not yet fully defined" (Conoco Phillips).
Residual (with qualification – i.e., using words and phraseology that unambiguously form analogies or metaphors)	"We won't rest on our laurels, but are committed to continuous improvement in all aspects of our business, including sustainability" (Cabot & Oil). (NB: Here, it is patently the case that nobody associated with the drafting of this statement is 'having a rest on bay leaves').
Residual (without qualification – i.e., without using words and phraseology, the meaning of which is unambiguously metaphoric or non-literal)	"We'll do this because being a good neighbor and always doing the right thing are two of our core values" (Devon Energy). (NB: Here, it is not clear whether the statement's author is prioritising being good only to the party who resides next door.)

Least transparent

Organisational Performance and Ethical Conduct: Further Reflection on the First-Order Issue

Debate about the nature of goodness and virtuosity is likely as old as humanity. Similarly, conjecture about whether being virtuous leads to material advantage also has a long lineage. It was noted in this article's introduction that a crucial reason the first order issue (the unselfconscious corporate virtuosity-performance connection) remains mostly unresolved is methodological. Specifically, it is not straightforward to establish long-term protocols for surreptitious inspection of an agent's actions and it is equivalently thorny to defend what doing good really means. Theses kinds of difficulties are exacerbated when an object of analytic interest switches from the individual to a corporate entity. Indeed, as Amazeen (2012) has indicated (and to repeat), consequential firm activity is never really secret and constructs such as goodness, virtuosity and the 'right thing to do' take on layers of complexity when making decisions about other people's resources and in multiple stakeholder contexts. In such circumstances, speculation about the innate or unselfconscious virtuosity-corporate performance causal link is likely to continue and will not be resolved through the publication of any one article or through application of one methodology. However, the issue itself is inherently a first-order concern and as such consequential. Specifically, if being an innately (unselfconsciously) good corporate citizen improves the bottom-line, then a raft of second-order matters arises. These include: 'What is the marginal (additional) value of firm stewards trumpeting their successes?' 'How should success be broadcast to achieve such marginal benefit?' And, perhaps more fundamentally, 'What kind of virtuosity is the kind that does the commercial enhancement?' By contrast, if there is no inherent link between innate (unselfconscious) virtuosity and corporate performance, three somewhat different lines of inquiry become salient. The first of these pertains exclusively to firm image management. The second to the more generic issue of what it means to be corporately virtuous. The third, perhaps

most pressing, to developing a rationale for corporate virtuosity (in other words, if being good does not enhance organisational performance, why do it? – a problem wrestled for millennia).

This article has presented and defended a novel way to establish that there is a connection between being virtuous and corporate performance. As such, its research question was answered in the affirmative, leading to rejection of the adage that perhaps, at least insofar as corporate life is concerned, virtue is not just its own reward but rather inherently boosts bottom-line outcomes.

As is inevitably the case when adapting methods for new problems (or using constructs in novel combinations to create new insight), there are several criticisms that can be made of the way the current project has derived its central conclusion. The more consequential of these criticisms are conceptual in nature and, for the most part, can be rebutted (or, at least, defended against).[13] Specifically, one may ask: is syntheticity of language use an appropriate measure of virtuosity? As noted, the rationale used in this study is well established (and presented earlier in Figure 1). It is as follows and can be summarised with three propositions:

First, synthetic statements are truth bearing propositions in that they rely on evidence and are falsifiable. In this sense, synthetic statements are a delivery means for scrutable statements of substance. They differ from those that add no informative value to a missive, are not falsifiable and preclude external examination.

Second, the analytic-synthetic distinction has not been widely embraced within management academia and is likely to be mostly unknown to executives and those formally

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[13] The technical criticisms concerning sample size and representativeness, etc., where dealt with in the 'methods' section.

reporting on firm operations. In practice, this means that, where reports are favoring synthetic propositions, they (relatively speaking) embody unselfconscious honesty as a virtue.

Third, it is uncontroversial to assert that honesty, in the broadest sense of the term, is a cornerstone of other desirable traits of corporate virtuosity (for further discussion on this, see again Bansal & Kistruck, 2006; Bhat, Hope & Kang, 2006, Bushman, Piotoski & Smith, 2004; Leuz & Oberholzer-Gee, 2006).

Conclusion

Ethics, be it focused on the actions of the individual or the corporation, entails an intertwined set of concerns that have disparate epistemological origins. These concerns originate from, on the one hand, conjecture about the nature of right and wrong and, on the other, empirical inquiry addressing what actually occurs. As such, one way of thinking about ethics is to view it as simultaneous reflection on what 'ought to be' and what 'is'. Undoubtedly, each set of concerns is consequential. However, at least insofar as the commercial world is concerned, what has been conspicuously absent – or at least diminishing in salience – since approximately the 1970s is speculation about the broader matter of how elements fit together. Amazeen (2011: 167), when commenting on the history of corporate social responsibility, hinted at the nature of this challenge when she noted that "While the social responsibility of a business was once arguably limited to increasing its profits, today's Zeitgeist suggests that corporations must go beyond merely considering their profits by also accounting for the social costs and benefits of their presence around the world." But why "must" they? No answer is given in the rest of Amazeen's article.

Two other aspects of Amazeen's musings call for further inquiry. First, she reflects little on the possibility that there may in fact be no such thing as 'going beyond profits.' Second, her associated implicit assumption that there is a trade-off between doing good and organisational

performance remains contested terrain. Its resolution has wide-ranging implications because, if unselfconsciously doing good coincides with better organisational outcomes, the debate about why firm stewards should act ethically becomes easier. Reflection on this phenomenon draws attention to a larger point, and one not generally well presented in business ethics literature. The point is this: knowing whether initiatives such as unpublicised and unheralded corporate social responsibility and corporate philanthropy actually improve the bottom-line is a first-order issue. Indeed, a case can be made that, if there is a casual sequence between corporate virtuosity and corporate performance, there ceases to be any such thing as corporate benevolence. To stress again Amazeen's (2011) other claim, these matters have become somewhat tangential in recent years.

In noting that such things as field and natural experiments are an inadequate substitute for their laboratory equivalents, C. Wright Mills (1959) made the enduring point (and made it better than others who followed him, in the present authors' judgement) that ultimately a compelling narrative must do the heavy lifting when it comes to establishing causality in social science. In this vein, insofar as the present study is concerned, perhaps the most tightly worded rationale that can be advanced and defended is as follows: 1) being unselfconsciously transparent is a sound basis to conclude that executives are intrinsically honest and, as such, ethical; 2) ethical executives preside over better performing commercial entities. Of course, being based on one novel method and plagued by the generic problem of correlation not being equivalent to causation, this study is not the end of the story about the corporate virtuosity-performance connection. Indeed, it is a new starting point for refocusing a concern that has become marginal, but which remains stubbornly a first-order concern.

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