Management as a Technical Practice: Professionalization or Responsibilization?

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This paper attempts to make sense of the apparent paradox of the successful representation of management as a technical practice coexisting with a lack of success in management sustaining a project of professionalization. The success of the former has, for many occupations, been the key to the latter, especially when allied with university licensing. The main issues and debates relating to management as a technical practice, management as a profession, and the role of the management academy are outlined. This leads to an alternative interpretation of their relation, in which the representation of management as a technical practice is envisaged not as a failed professionalization of management but rather as a successful responsibilization of managers.

KEY WORDS: management knowledge; management education; professionalization; responsibilization.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a long-running tension, or even a paradox, which lies at the heart of management—both as a social practice and as an academic discipline.[2] Briefly stated, that paradox is that, on the one hand, management has been seen as being capable of representing itself as a technical practice (Reed, 1989) which dominates ever more, and more diverse, areas of social activity (Deetz, 1992), while, on the other, it has been seen as being incapable of sustaining a project of professionalization (Abbott, 1988; Whitley, 1995). This is a paradox because if management is held to be a technical practice, then why is it not possible for managers to achieve closure around a body of technical knowledge and, consequently, to license and control managerial work? If, on the other hand, man-

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[2] Throughout this paper, the term "management" is used in this sense: management as social practice and as academic discipline. It might be more accurate, but clearly more cumbersome, to use the term "the discursive and nondiscursive practices of management." Where what is being discussed is management simply as an academic subject in universities, the term "management studies" is used; where what is being discussed is management simply as social practice, the term "managerial practice" is used. Management is not used in the industrial relations sense of "the management."

agement is incapable of professionalization, what is the source of its ability to enter and dominate ever more areas of social activity?

The nature of this paradox can initially be apprehended in terms of what has been perhaps the most influential modern work on the professions, namely, Andrew Abbott's (1988) *The System of the Professions*. According to this analysis, the "system of professions" (1988, p. 86) is a continual battle for jurisdiction over particular territories of expertise, territories which are contested between groupings in a zero-sum game. There are limits to the extent to which the territory of other professions can be raided, however, since "no profession can stretch its jurisdictions infinitely" (1988, p. 88). On this understanding of the nature of a profession, management does not qualify, since ". . . despite efforts, the area of business management has never been made an exclusive jurisdiction" (Abbott, 1988, p. 103).

The reason for this failure is held to be deficiencies in the nature of knowledge in the field of management.[3] Management is simply incapable of generating the type of systematic knowledge which would allow closure around managerial activities by a professional grouping of managers. Still less is it possible to generate the abstractions and generalizations which would facilitate the expansion of management into the territories of other professional groups.

The supposed deficiencies of the knowledge base which might underpin managerial professionalization lead directly to the nature and status of management education. The premier management education qualification, the MBA,

> . . . covers extremely diverse forms of training and knowledge, and an equally diverse body of abstractions about the work ought to be done. Psychology, sociology, administration, economics, law, banking, accounting, and other professions all claim some jurisdiction in business management. . . . (Abbott, 1988, p. 103)

Via a different type of analysis, Richard Whitley (1984a, 1995) has, through a series of publications, come to similar conclusions to Abbott about the relationship between the knowledge base of management and the weakness of managerial professionalization. Management studies is a "fragmented adhocracy" (Whitley, 1984a) characterized by low levels of mutual dependence between researchers and high levels of task uncertainty in research. Hence,

> the professionalization of managerial skills on the basis of academic knowledge is, then, unlikely to develop very strongly, even in Anglo-Saxon societies where "professionalism" represents an important occupational ideal. (Whitley, 1995, p. 103)

Yet despite the apparent failure of management to professionalize, the most cursory knowledge of contemporary organizational life reveals management in the ascendent. This is not a statement about industrial relations, to which it may nevertheless be linked, but rather about the ability of management to do precisely

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[3] Subsequently I argue that this is not an adequate account of the failure of management to professionalize.

what Abbott's analysis suggests it should be unable to do: to extend its juris-
diction at the expense of other forms of expertise. The managerialization of the
public sector is a particularly high-profile example because of its political sen-
sitivity. The repeated complaint made by professionals in the National Health
Service, for example, is that their judgment, values, expertise, and autonomy
are being circumscribed by those of management and managers.

As well as extending the locus of its operation, management seems to be
consolidating its grip on its more traditional sphere of operations (i.e., the
industrial corporation). A bewildering variety of jargon and techniques has been
spawned—from MBO to TQM to BPR—acquaintance with which is part of the
currency of career success (Watson, 1994, 1995) and requires considerable effort
to acquire. Thus management training and education, whether in the form of
the MBA or as part of the development of the "learning organization" (Senge,
1995), are becoming increasingly unavoidable.

The power of management within the industrial corporation, and its dis-
persal outside this setting, has been identified as no less than a colonization of
the lifeworld (Deetz, 1992) and as a new ideology supplanting both Capitalism
and Communism (Enteman, 1993), while for Ritzer (1993) it is part of the
"mcdonaldization of society." Such analyses are recent exemplars of well-
established (albeit diverse) critical traditions which point to the nature and con-
sequences of encroaching administration, managerialization, bureaucratization,
and rationalization in modern societies (Weber, 1922/1968, Vol. 2; Weil, 1933/
1988; Rizzi, 1939; Burnham, 1945; Whyte, 1956; Marcuse, 1964; Jacobi, 1973;
Foucault, 1979; Habermas, 1987).[4]

From such critical perspectives, the story which we might expect to be
telling about the linkages among management as a technical practice, manage-
ment as a profession, and management education would be as follows (in sche-
matic fashion): *Management is represented as a technical practice in order to
legitimate and extend its social power (in relation to the elite interests of man-
agers, or in relation to class domination, or as part of a process of rational-
ization, or . . .). Professionalization represents the most developed form of
legitimation, resting as it does upon ideologies of integrity, independence, ser-
vice, and expertise. Management education acts as an institutional means
through which management as a technical practice is represented and entry to
the profession of management is controlled.*

The problem such a story runs into (apart from anything else) is the failure
of management to professionalize. Yet it remains true that management is rep-
resented as a technical practice, and plainly there are issues of legitimation at

[4]The diversity of the references given, and the relationships between the authors and the different
concepts invoked in this paragraph, begs questions of such scope and complexity as to be inap-
propriate for the present occasion. My intention is simply to flag the connection between the
contemporary debates about management and much more long-standing arguments about the nature
of *society.*

stake here. Furthermore, if management education[5] is not the link between technical practice and professionalization, how else is it to be conceptualized? There is a long-standing tradition in the theorization of education which stresses its role in the reproduction of social domination (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). More recently, foucauldian work has provided analysis of the discursive "construction of governable persons" in a number of different contexts, including managerial and organizational ones (e.g., Rose, 1989; Townley, 1994), and enumerated some of the social technologies through which this is effected. Such analysis lays stress upon the notion of "responsibilization"—in other words, the regulation of subjectivity in ways which inculcate habits of self-control, self-management, planning, etc. In this paper, it is suggested that management education may be read in this light and that it constitutes one type of response to the "trust" problem in organizations through the responsibilization of managers.

In summary, then, this paper attempts to explore the nexus of management as a technical practice, management as a profession, and management education by offering some perspectives on each element. Inevitably because of the breadth of the concerns and the complexity of some of the literature involved, it has been necessary to skate over some difficult issues in order to present a brief and (hopefully) coherent argument.[6] The intention in Sections 2 and 3 is to set out some basic groundwork for what follows in Section 4.

In Section 2, management as a technical practice is discussed, with particular reference to the invocation of science and what this means for the constitution of management. In Section 3, management as a profession is considered. Rather than discuss this in terms of the knowledge base of management, the sociological conditions for professionalization are discussed. In Section 4, an understanding of management education is offered which stresses its role not in the professionalization of management but in the "responsibilization" of managers just alluded to. Moreover, management education in a broad sense is held to be implicated in the development of a "management-speak" industry, and it is this as much as anything which accounts for the way in which managerial discourse is able to insinuate itself into ever more diverse areas of social life.

2. MANAGEMENT AS A TECHNICAL PRACTICE

Management has often—even usually—been represented as a technical practice. On this view, there exists a body of scientifically validated knowledge

[5] Here I mean, of course, management education as currently, managerially conceived. The raison d'être of management education on this view is its utility to managers, organizations, and the economy. On this view, management education must have some functional relation to managerial practice. See Grey and Mitev (1995) for a different view.

[6] For detailed introductions to the debates with which the paper engages, see Reed (1989), Reed and Anthony (1992), and Abbott (1988).

which is applied by managers in different settings. A weaker version of such a view would be that, even if such a body of knowledge does not yet exist, it is in the process of emerging and is retarded not by any barriers of principle, but only by those of time, resources, and intellect.[7]

In a comprehensive overview of the sociology of management, Michael Reed (1989, pp. 2–3) states,

> The technical perspective offers a conception of management as a rationally designed and operationalised tool for the realisation of predominantly instrumental values concerned with the systematic co-ordination of social action on a massive scale . . . . Management . . . constitutes the neutral social technology necessary to attain collective goals that are unrealisable without it.

While rival perspectives on management certainly exist, it is not unreasonable to claim that these have largely been subordinate to an understanding of management as a technical practice founded upon a body of established scientific knowledge. Such an understanding should certainly be seen as an *accomplishment*, that is, as a social construction reflecting certain exercises of power.[8] Thus, to take just one episode in the history of management, according to Child (1969), management developed in the context of a movement for industrial democracy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Management could act as a way of defusing growing trade unionism, while offering a more legitimate ethical basis for industrial authority than that of ownership. Yet this purpose shifted in the period following the First World War:

> . . . Management based upon expertise would . . . be in the legitimate and most effective position to define just what the industrial situation required. It is therefore not surprising to find that eventually most management writers joined in the reaction against the idea of joint manager-worker decisionmaking. This rejection was . . . excused in terms of the technical prerequisites for efficient industrial performance. (Child, 1969, p. 54)

What this should suggest is that management was not initially and necessarily understood as a technical practice and, indeed, that such an understanding was an "excuse." In other words, management was constituted as a technical prac-

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[7] This vision of the prospects for management studies is extremely pervasive, and has been so through the history of the subject, most recently in Kay (1994). It reflects an "evolutionary" view of scientific knowledge and a positivistic understanding of management as a branch of that scientific knowledge. That management studies is always "becoming" but never "becomes" might give pause for thought, but of course the real function of such rhetoric is legitimatory. See Jacques (1996) for some fascinating discussion of positivism and evolutionary thinking in management. For an explicit statement of the evolutionary view, see Wren (1994).

[8] Of particular interest are the ways in which the understanding of management as a disreputable practice (Pollard, 1968; Mant, 1977) disappeared in the course of the nineteenth century.

tice for reasons of legitimation.[9] For such legitimation to be effective, it was necessary that a body of technical knowledge be articulated. To put this at the most general level,

> managerial authority, in its typical, Weberian, rational-legal form, rests on the claim
> that its knowledge base is Scientific and, as such, is characteristic of thinking in an
> epoch which has been labelled modernist. (Jackson and Carter, 1995, p. 198)

That is not to say that such knowledge was "cynically," or, for that matter, deliberately, brought into existence for legitimatory purposes; given the scientistic and taxonomic preoccupations of the Modern eara (Foucault, 1970), it must have seemed an obvious way to proceed. But having emerged, such knowledge had effects in terms of legitimating management. Or, to put it another way, it is hard to see how, in the absence of the development of a body of technical knowledge, management could have sustained and developed its social power.

The most obvious manifestation of the constitution of managerial technical expertise is Scientific Management, as publicized and popularized by F. W. Taylor. But it is well-known that Taylor was but one, and perhaps not even the most original, of those engaged in similar endeavors. Fayol, Urwick, Brech, and Ure are often cited in this regard (see Wren, 1994), and there is a host of less well-known figures. For example, in the United States, Daniel McCallum was a midnineteenth-century American railway engineer who proposed a system of division of labor, reporting procedure, surveillance, and quality control of an essentially Taylorist type (Chandler, 1965). In Britain, writers such as Herbert Casson (1915, p. 9) popularized and synthesized emerging writing on management: ". . . I propose to prove that Business is now being developed into a Science." Casson goes on to enumerate 16 "axioms" of business which are seen to be the foundations of the new science of business management. These are a strange mixture of the self-evident and the dubious, interspersed with analogies from physics, geometry, and biology. This very juxtaposition of management (or business) with more established sciences is plainly a key to its appeal, however. It is a tendency which remains at the heart of much contemporary management studies, where "positivism is still the dominant ideology" (Mitroff and Churchman, 1992, p. 134).

The positivism of management studies is a broad and problematic issue

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[9] It should not be assumed that the use of technical/scientific expertise is, or was, the only strategy available for the legitimation of managerial authority. Perhaps the classic study in this field (Bendix, 1956) indicates that a range of "ideologies of management" can be detected, including those which relate to the entrepreneurship as much as the technical expertise. Such sources of legitimation have in recent years again become more important under the influence of discourses of the enterprising self within the work organization and in management theory (du Gay, 1995). Nonetheless, the making of management as a technical practice would seem to have been a more general trend, although the *content* of managerial technical practice can be seen to be subject to periodic transformations (Barley and Kunda, 1992).

which cannot be addressed in detail here. Positivism in this context, following Giddens (1974, pp. 1–4), has three broad characteristics.

(i) The concepts and methods of the natural sciences (e.g., in terms of experimentation and the generation of general laws) are the most (or only) appropriate for studying human activity.
(ii) Knowledge arises from direct perceptions of the world, and nothing is real which is not knowable in this way.
(iii) Value judgments are not knowable in this way and are inappropriate to scientific enquiry.

Such a position has become increasingly suspect, if not discredited, in much social science (Bernstein, 1976), perhaps especially in sociology (Game, 1990). To a much more limited extent, it has been questioned in management studies (e.g., Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Knights, 1992).

But the positivistic commitments of management are rather different from those of social science. In social science the debate about positivism has had, to give an exceedingly concise review, two key elements. First, Is social science like natural science? The answer, at least since Winch (1958), has increasingly been negative. Second, Does natural science conform to the received model of social scientists? Again, the answer, at least since Kuhn (1962), has tended to be negative. In management, these debates are marginal, partly because they miss the point. Positivism is not the philosophy of management but the ideology. That is, the language of science has been invoked to bestow legitimacy.[10] One could of course argue that the same is true for social science, but the emergence of the social sciences from the Enlightenment was always a more philosophically engaged project than in management, so that whereas social science may have looked to a received version of natural science for legitimation, management has looked to a received version of social science, and thus its philosophical engagements are more attenuated and marginal.

What is striking about the emergence of a technical body of knowledge in management, then, is the way "scientific management" deployed a truncated and probably philosophically indefensible conception of science. In other words, while the positivism of social science has become increasingly problematic because of shifts in the philosophy of science and social science, the positivism of management would *never* have stood up to much scrutiny, even at the time when positivism was in vogue in the social sciences. Instead, the key feature of the positivism of management was its stress on systematization, which might

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[10]There is an argument that positivistic science is itself ideological (Habermas, 1971), and if this is so, the distinctions drawn among natural science, social science, and management may appear redundant. But the concern is to point to the specific ideological issues in relation to management.

be a part of scientific method, but scarcely exhausts such method. Systematization has the rhetorical effect of seeming to capture the scientific "mood," without the need for the kind of methodological reflection which has always characterized the history of both natural and social science. As Nyland (1988, p. 56) notes, the pioneers of scientific management were "systematizers" and they left an enduring engineering ideology in managerial discourses (Willmott, 1984).

Although the issues of the scientific status of management have been dealt with only briefly here, the importance, for present purposes is this: it is largely irrelevant that much of what constitutes the scientific knowledge of management is demonstrably *unscientific* according to most understandings of science (Jackson and Carter, 1995). For example, the Hawthorne experiments have been widely criticized (e.g., Carey, 1967) in terms of the extraordinary laxity of their methodology. Yet this hardly diminishes the significance of the attempts to put management on a scientific footing, for once again, the issue is the legitimation of management as a body of knowledge and, hence, the claims of managers, uniquely, to be able to operationalize such knowledge. No matter how flawed they may have been, the Hawthorne experiments, like Taylor's scientific management experiments and the whole parade of organization science studies, continue to be reproduced as bedrocks of management thought and are correspondingly influential in defining management as a technical practice.

The deployment of scientific rhetoric in the constitution of management as a technical practice has two linked elements which are of crucial significance. The first is the development of a corpus of knowledge to which managers have privileged access, exemplified by Taylorism, but no less, say, Total Quality Management. The second element is the development of the notion of the neutrality of management (MacIntyre, 1981). The existence of a body of technical management knowledge is bound up with a distinctive form of rationality which has been widely discussed. It is the rationality of means, referred to by Weber (1968) as formal rationality and by others (Habermas, 1971) as technical or instrumental rationality. The focus of such rationality is the use of rational means toward the achievement of a given end. Thus, according to Weber, bureaucratic organizations are characterized by high degrees of formal rationality, in that they utilize the most technically efficient means toward their ends.

Again, it is beyond the scope of this analysis to discuss issues of rationality in detail, but the point for present purposes is that the domination of formal or instrumental rationality rapidly slides into a "technocratic consciousness" (Alvesson, 1987) wherein management techniques are merely means to some other end. That is, they are represented as normatively neutral because they can be put into the service of a range of ends (which may themselves not be neutral). Management is a technique, on this view, and whether it is used to run concen-

tration camps or hospitals is not something which inheres in that technique, but is a contingent attribute of its deployment.[11]

The linkage between the neutrality of management and the appeal to science is not coincidental. The received version of positivism found in management draws a strict separation between fact and value, and thus the facticity of scientific management and its value neutrality go hand in hand. Moreover, the importance of developing a set of generalized "laws," such as Casson's axioms or Taylor's principles, must be recognized. If management were situation specific, it would not be possible to sustain the idea that managers had particular access to expertise. Rather, expertise would be a feature of habituation in a particular location. The importance of management as a technical practice is that it establishes principles or techniques whose application is universal—from concentration camp to hospital—and this again requires the assumption of neutrality in that, by separating management from its context, it is also thereby separated from its moral and political implications.

The twin features of an appeal to science and the claim of neutrality might be seen as providing a strong basis for professionalization. And management has long had aspirations to be regarded as a profession, certainly since the early part of this century (e.g., Brandeis, 1914). In the following section, the failure of management to professionalize is considered.

3. MANAGEMENT AS A PROFESSION

There are some occupations which have the status of classical professions. They include medicine, law, and—albeit more problematically—accountancy. They are classical professions because they are able to exercise high levels of closure around particular skills, and these are skills which are economically and socially valued. So, at least, goes one kind of fairly conventional account in the sociology of professions literature (Wilensky, 1964). Of course it might equally well be argued that the ability to be persuasive of an entitlement to be regarded as "classical" is in fact one aspect of the power of particular occupational groups to achieve these high levels of closure.

The Abbott (1988) view, referred to earlier, of professions not just closing around particular occupational territories but also seeking to extend those territories tends to mean in practice that contestations occur at boundaries. For example, at the boundary of medicine there are contestations between psychiatric and psychological treatments of mental conditions and between conventional and complementary medicine. Similarly, there are contestations over newly emerging fields of potential professionalization such as management consul-

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[11] See Grey (1996a) for a fuller discussion of management, rationality, science, and neutrality.

tancy, where, among other players, both accountants and bankers lay claim to expertise.

So classical professions turn out to be those which have managed to (at least) hold onto their territory over a fairly long time period. It is not that some kinds of occupations are *inherently* professional,[12] and it is important not to fall into the rather facile error of giving professions an analytical value, which ignores, or takes as unproblematic, the fact that that value is part of the very process of professionalization. This is a significant point in the context of the present discussion, since it means that the failure of management to professionalize should not be seen as an outcome of its being "the wrong kind of knowledge." This seems to be Abbott's (1988) view of management, and moreover, he argues that where the "right kind" of management knowledge exists—such as cost accounting—it was rapidly assimilated into the accounting profession. Yet if we consider accounting, it is plain that its knowledge base can readily be shown to be a social construct (Hines, 1988) and its power an outcome of a series of ideological posturings and state intervention (Sikka and Willmott, 1995). So accounting, like management, represents itself as a technical practice. Accounting is no more inherently a technical practice than management, but it has been much more persuasive both in its claims to be so and in its project to professionalize. Thus, rather than consider management as a professional practice in terms of its knowledge base, it is necessary to look at the sociological conditions of professionalization.

The ability of a profession to exert monopolistic or near-monopolistic control over a particular occupation is a complex matter. One of the key characteristics is that of licensing. In other words, there is a requirement of qualification and accreditation as a precondition of professional practice. Here universities often play a key role in controlling the disbursement of the relevant qualifications (Larson, 1977, p. 36). Typically, however, universities are but one of the parties involved, with professional associations or other training institutions (e.g., hospitals or inns of court) having a role. In some cases, such as accountancy, the role of universities can be relatively slight, with accounting degrees offering, at most, some limited exemption from the examinations of professional bodies. Moreover, as Abbott (1988, pp. 195–211) points out, there is variation not just between professions but between different nation-states as to the precise role played by universities in the licensing of professional knowledge and the provision of professional training. Nevertheless, even where universities have little formal role in profession formation, they can act as a first precondition to professional practice, where such practice requires graduate status, and can act as

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[12] Indeed, it is important to note the culturally specificity of the very concept of a "profession" (Sarfatti Larson, 1984).

institutions of professional socialization in a rather diffuse sense (Larson, 1977, p. 153).

But the licensing of practice is not the only element in the professionalization of particular occupations. Professions also act to regulate their members. Self-regulation is a hallmark of professional knowledge because, precisely by virtue of the closure around that knowledge, it is held that outsiders will lack the comprehension necessary to undertake regulation. Part of that regulation includes the development of codes of ethics, and this links directly to the appeal which professions typically make to the notion of the "public interest"—which they purport to serve (Kimball, 1992). Moreover, successfully professionalized occupations have the capacity to define and redefine the tasks they perform so that professions do not simply occupy a particular organizational territory, but also orchestrate the topography of that territory.

So what about management? As shown earlier, Abbott, among others, is very clear that management is not a profession, and this is to be explained by certain characteristics of management knowledge, in particular, its failure to generate appropriate abstractions. But that type of explanation has already been rejected, since it relies on the assumption that some types of knowledge are inherently professionalizable. What matters is not having the "right kind" of knowledge, but the ability to represent a certain body of knowledge in the "right way."

A more comprehensive account of the failure of management to professionalize is offered by Reed (1989, pp. 161–164). He identifies three central reasons for this failure. First, following Child et al. (1983), Reed sees management as being internally fragmented and, also, as having historically lacked state support for professionalization. Second, the location of management within formally rationalized bureaucracies means that managers are organizationally dependent and less able to develop the autonomy associated with professions. Third, and relatedly, managers, or at least middle managers, are increasingly subject to surveillance and monitoring as their work becomes routinized, as argued by Clegg et al. (1986). Given all of these circumstances, there are limited possibilities for management to effect closure around a skill base, to define tasks and standards, and to self-regulate. In all these dimensions, then, management differs from the characteristics of the "classic" professions.

Still, there are some difficulties with this explanation of the failure of management to professionalize or, at least, some further nuances which require discussion. First, fragmentation is not in itself a barrier to professionalization: in the medical profession, for example, there is considerable fragmentation, even hostility, between specialisms. There seems no reason to think that the distinction between, say, personnel and marketing managers is any greater than that between surgeons and physicians. In the latter case, each specialism has its

own association, but that does not detract from the overarching professional formation of medicine. In the case of management, specialist groups have sought to construct professional bodies and identities, but with limited success and without the construction of an overarching professional formation of management. Of groups associated with management, accountants have been the most successful, along with perhaps information and computing specialists. But in these cases, part of the process of professional definition has been a distancing from "general management." It is also the case that the state has not been entirely neglectful of management (Locke, 1984, 1989). At least spasmodically, there has been a concern with the development of management education. Thus the inception of business schools in the United Kingdom, for example, grew directly out of the Franks Report commissioned by the National Economic Development Council (Whitley *et al.*, 1981, pp. 44–46).

The issue of the location of managers in bureaucratic organizations is also less than straightforward.[13] Shifting organizational structures mean that the overweening rationalization which might have been held to have undercut the possibility of autonomous professional organization appears less attenuated than hitherto. On the other hand, given that one of the key effects of "postbureaucracy" (Heckscher and Donnellon, 1994) has been to fragment managerial careers and disrupt the relationship between individual managers and corporations, it follows that the organizational specificity of managing may also be on the wane. Larson (1977, p. 206) distinguishes professions and bureaucracies by suggesting that bureaucratic authority is collective and structural, residing in managers by virtue of their role, whereas professional power, while asserted collectively, bestows freedom and trust upon individual professionals. One might argue that this analysis overstates the depersonalized character of bureaucracy. But in any case, the changes just alluded to make it an unrecognizable picture of contemporary organizations.

In more recent work, Reed and Anthony (1992, pp. 598–599) have suggested that "... a 'professional model' of management education and occupational formation may be more feasible than the critics imply." This possibility exists in part because of the shifting patterns of managerial work just alluded to. Thus we can expect

> ... the emergence of new groups of managers who will apply their expertise in such a way that cognitive diversity and collective learning will be enhanced. The reintegration of conception and execution within the "mega corporation," made possible by information technology and its organizational consequences, will produce new foundations for managerial authority. ... (Reed and Anthony, 1992, p. 602)

[13] Perhaps more significant than organizational structure in the restriction of managerial autonomy is the structure of ownership. While the view of managers as being simply and solely agents of capital has been rightly criticized, the existence and demands of shareholders place limits upon the autonomy of individual managers and also erode the potential capacity for a putative management profession to self-regulate. After all, managers are also employees (Jacques, 1996).

This view receives support from Heckscher (1995), who analyzes changing patterns of managerial employment to conclude for the need for a professional model for managers divorced from specific organizational settings. Such a development, as Reed and Anthony recognize, poses a challenge to conventional management education. In particular, they point to the need to move away from firm-specific needs and skills and narrow vocationalism (Reed and Anthony, 1992, p. 601). This is a challenge which, arguably, has still to be met (French and Grey, 1996; Grey, 1996a) but suggests, at least in principle, that one of the barriers to the professionalization of management may be broken. On the other hand, it could be argued that this basis for managerial professionalization is but new words to an old tune. The MBA degree has long been predicated on the assumption that there is, or desire that there should be, some set of knowledge which transcends the firm-specific know-how of managers. Yet as indicated earlier, the MBA has failed to identify such a knowledge base.

Reed and Anthony develop their argument in part through an engagement with Abbott (indeed they quote the same passage), and they invoke Abbott's (1988, p. 325) notion of organizational professionalism as the basis for the claim of the potential for management to professionalize (Reed and Anthony, 1992, p. 599). Yet the implication of Abbott's discussion at this point is that professionalizing projects in general are likely to be rendered ineffective by organization. Thus, the prospects for management seem dimmer, not brighter, if Abbott's argument is accepted.

Finally, the third of Reed's (1989) barriers to managerial professionalization, the proletarianization of managerial work, will be considered. There is certainly plenty of evidence that this has occurred, not least as a result of the technological changes which Reed and Anthony (1992) mention. The routinization of more junior managerial tasks has been responsible for generating unprecedented levels of job insecurity among managers. For example, the development of credit rating systems in the banking sector has been responsible for the deskilling and ''deprofessionalization'' of bank managers. Yet, again, it is not plain that this constitutes an insuperable barrier to professionalization, any more than the routinization of lower-level legal work destroys the legal profession. Routinization is likely to shift the lines of demarcations of professionals and others, and perhaps to reduce the size of professional associations, rather than to destroy professions as such.

4. MANAGEMENT EDUCATION, TECHNICAL EXPERTISE, AND PROFESSIONALIZATION

So far, two themes have been sketched. One suggests that the dominant representation of management is as a technical practice. The other suggests that, for a variety of rather complex reasons, management has not achieved profes-

sional status. In both of these aspects, management education plays a pivotal role which has been alluded to only tangentially so far. Management education in this context denotes a broad set of concerns which are not reducible to the simple transmission of knowledge. Equally important is the production of knowledge and the production of credentials.

The notion of management as a technical practice is, to some considerable extent, an artifact of management education. It is of course true that many of the so-called pioneers of management thought (such as Taylor or Fayol) derived their techniques, rules, and systems explicitly from experience. Yet throughout the twentieth century, from Mayo to McGregor to Michael Porter, the university has produced and legitimated new theories and techniques of management, as well as incorporating and reproducing the work of industrial "pioneers."[14] Similarly, the university has been centrally implicated in the project of professionalization, which, for all that it may have failed in relation to "classical" conceptions of professions, has had a significant impact upon the managerial labour market, especially in the United States, where a significant number of managers have the MBA qualification. If we add to this the much greater number of people who take management as all or part of an undergraduate degree, the influence of the university is still greater. And if we add the number of people exposed to business school theories through in-house training courses, consultants' interventions, guru seminars, and self-help literature (Garsten and Grey, 1997), it becomes clear that the role of management education in the dissemination of managerial discourse is profound.

Is such managerial discourse necessarily articulating an understanding of management as a technical practice? Elsewhere (Grey and Mitev, 1995; Grey, 1996a) I have claimed that this is so as regards the mainstream of representations of management in "textbook knowledge." Others have made similar claims. Jackson and Carter (1995, p. 200) argue that management education routinely reproduces notions of management as science, even though, paradoxically, this means that ". . . facts which are, *prima facie*, incorrect are being taught to generation after generation of students destined to be the managers of the future." Similarly, "The business school speaks the artificially clarified and semantically impoverished language of hypothesis testing alone" (Jacques, 1996, p. xi). Plainly this links directly to the notion that positivism is the dominant "ideology" of management thought, referred to earlier, and this observation is by no means detracted from by the existence of the panoply of "new age," "postmodern," and "postbureaucratic" writings on management. Such writings lay claim to alternative "human" or "phenomenological" understandings of management, yet they remain wedded to a faith in wielding techniques of control.

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[14] One probably hears more of Taylor, and certainly of Fayol, in the business school than on the shop floor or in the boardroom!

Guidelines for the manipulation of organizational symbols are no less a mani-
festation of management as a technical practice than the algorithms of opera-
tional research (a point much misunderstood by some avowedly critical
management academics).

To accord management education a central role in the elaboration of man-
agement as a technical practice is to present a sharp contrast to one of the
dominant understandings of the history of management education. As long ago
as 1776, Adam Smith, in *The Wealth of Nations*, bemoaned the fact that uni-
versities showed no interest in emerging issues of business and technology [see
Bendix (1956, pp. 22–34) for context and discussion]. Casson (1915, pp. 13–14),
referred to earlier as a would-be architect of business science, commences with
a scathing attack on universities conducted in terms which are still often heard
today:

> Naturally the Universities could not give us a Science of Business. Professors have
> never been in touch with the business world. They have never properly appreciated
> and respected Business. They have had the snobbish hallucination that Business was
> not a proper subject for professors to investigate. . . . Consequently, there is no Chair
> of Business Science in any great British University. Not even in the United States,
> where Business has a higher social status, are there more than five or six Universities
> that have officially recognized Business as a fit subject of investigation. . . . If there
> is ever to be a Science of Business, it will have to be developed by business men
> themselves. It must not be the work of theorists. . . .

That universities did indeed hold such views seems to be confirmed by the
contemporary writing of the American, Thorstein Veblen (1918, pp. 209–210):
"A college of commerce is . . . peculiarly incompatible with the cultural purpose
of the university. It belongs in the corporation of learning no more than a
department of athletics." Again, this is a view which finds many contemporary
echoes. But before concluding that management theory (or business science, or
commerce, or however we choose to denote the representation of management
as a technical practice) was developed in the face of the opposition of the
university, it is worth remembering that Veblen was *bemoaning what had already
happened.* He saw the American university as having already been corrupted
(not simply by the existence of commerce departments, but by the business
orientations of university administrators). And according to Bledstein (1976, pp.
287–288), Veblen in fact massively underestimated the extent to which Amer-
ican universities had already become enmeshed in a middle-class "culture of
professionalism" (as against disinterested scholarship) from at least 1870 onward.

In fact, admittedly mainly outside universities, various forms of technical
and "management" education can be found in abundance throughout England
(and especially Scotland) from the mideighteenth century onward [Pollard (1968,
pp. 127–147) provides massive and detailed historical evidence for this]. It is
important to avoid anachronistic understandings both of university education

and of management, both of which were substantially made or remade in the course of the nineteenth century. But if we count as management education schools teaching commercial subjects,[15] then the evidence is that it flourished from the Industrial revolution onward.

The opposition to universities as a place to educate managers came as much from outside as from within (Pollard, 1968, p. 132). Even though Casson (1915) bemoans the snobbish uninterest of "professors," he also makes it clear that they are so unworldly and theoretical that it would be unlikely that they would have much to contribute. Engwall (1992) discusses the meeting between Mercury (the Roman god of merchants) and Minerva (wisdom) in a detailed history of management education. This study confirms that there was severe resistance from both sides to the development of university level management education. But it also shows that, despite this resistance, such education was developing very rapidly—albeit under heterogeneous labels—from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In the United States, in particular, business schools developed rapidly from the 1880s and, by the 1950s, partly as a result of state intervention, were conceptualized as sites for the development of organizational and management science (Barley and Kunda, 1992; Engwall, 1992; Locke, 1984, 1989). It is a conceptualization which, while by no means unchallenged, appears still to be dominant.

The contention, then, is that the representation of management as a technical practice emerges from, or, at least, is authorized by, the university. More than this, it can be argued that it developed not just in the face of opposition from, but actually in opposition to, managers. Kanter (1977) suggests that one of the key problems faced in the nineteenth-century expansion and bureaucratization of the family firm was that of recruiting trustworthy managers (see also Littler, 1982; Rueschmeyer, 1986). And the "trust problem" is by no means of solely historical interest—indeed trust has emerged as one of the most significant topics in contemporary organizational theory (Kramer and Tyler, 1996). In the nineteenth century, this problem was resolved by employing managers who were known personally to owners or who seemed to share similar social characteristics with owners. This tended to lead to a homogeneity and homosociality among managers, attributes which continued with the development of large-scale bureaucracies in the twentieth century. While this poses issues about the elitism and exclusivity of the managerial classes, the present point is a different one. The scope for appointing trustworthy managers from the ranks of one's social peers clearly has limits—the limits of personal acquaintance and, of course, the fact that such acquaintances are not necessarily trustworthy anyway. No doubt patronage continues in many forms within and between orga-

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[15] Languages, bookkeeping, shorthand, commercial law (of various countries), political economy, and navigation (Pollard, 1968, p. 131).

nizations, but one of the key features of bureaucratic rationality was the stress it placed on recruitment and promotion on the basis of qualifications, experience, and competence. While managerial experience might lie outside the purview of the university, it was the university which was able to license qualifications and competence, and, increasingly, did so. At around the time that the trust problem loomed in family firms, so business schools emerged, with the foundation of the Wharton School in 1881.

Somehow the claims of expertise underwritten by such institutions were able to stand proxy for a certain claim of "moral" respectability. This might seem a puzzling claim to make if one adhered to more conventional accounts of management and management education. These accounts might suggest that the need for qualified managers arose because of the increasing levels of size, complexity, and functional specialization in organizations. However, this view assumes that the skills acquired through management education contribute to enhanced individual and organizational performance and, in this sense, that management education has a functional justification. Yet such a contribution has never been conclusively demonstrated and a number of influential commentators, such as Henry Mintzberg, have suggested that management education may actually be damaging to effective managerial practice.

If the attraction to organizations of business school graduates is not their technical competence *per se*, an alternative explanation might be that the most significant thing about management education is its capacity to "responsibilize" managers, to render them trustworthy and predictable by virtue of their beliefs and behaviors. A close analogy would be the role which accounting degrees play in the accountancy profession. It is commmonplace for graduates with such degrees to be recruited by accounting firms, even though it is well-known within such firms that the qualification is of very limited relevance to their work and, even, that graduates with this background find training more difficult than "non-relevant" graduates. Yet the attraction of accounting graduates is that they are seen to have indicated their commitment to the "idea" of accountancy and, in short, have shown themselves to be the "right kind of person," an attribute of considerable value in the successful development of an accountancy career (Grey, 1994).

Returning to management education, the role of MBA programs in reproducing certain kinds of norms has been commented upon from several perspectives. Leavitt (1991), noting the importance of socialization processes in producing MBAs, argues for the need to try to direct and enhance this socialization in ever more controlled ways. Whitley *et al.* (1981) show the relationship between the MBA and wider structures of social inequality and elite reproduction. More recently, Sinclair (1995) shows the male and masculinist bias built into the MBA experience. Thus there is considerable support for the view that MBA programs embody and transmit *values*.

To put matters plainly, the point about having an MBA is not the technical utility of the content, but the fact that it denotes a certain orientation which renders graduates receptive to "corporate needs." One aspect of this is that the MBA offers a means of a acquiring cultural capital and social prestige (Whitley *et al.*, 1981; Collin, 1996). But this is part of a Faustian pact in which the student accepts that s/he must learn and give respect to (and even accept) the "scientific truths" of management propounded in the business school. This is why it is possible for busienss schools to get away with teaching generation after generation facts which are incorrect, as Jackson and Carter (1995, p. 200) demonstrate. It also explains why studies of managerial work (Carlson, 1951; Stewart, 1967; Mintzberg, 1973; Kotter, 1982; Watson, 1994) consistently find a divergence between this work and rationalistic, technicist management theory accounts of what that work is supposed to consist of. Finally, it explains why, at the level of pedagogy, it is reported (Thompson and McGivern, 1996) to be so difficult to persuade students of the truth of the textbook abstractions of management education or, alternatively, why students will collaborate in accepting these "truths" through a "contract of cynicism" (Watson, 1996) in order to gain credentials.

The capacity of business schools to responsibilize their graduates should be seen as a specific aspect of the types of social control entailed in the reproduction of subjects as "docile"—a notion much favored by Foucauldian scholars among others. While this should not be taken to imply that resistance to managerial responsibilization is absent, it does suggest that managers are as much a target for organizational control as "workers." The existence of "maverick" managers who betray the trust placed in them indicates that managerial responsibility is an accomplishment which is underwritten by specific social arrangements. As soon as we move away from envisaging power and control as being imposed by one powerful group (e.g., managers) upon another less powerful group (e.g., workers), then we are obliged to consider the ways in which social order is reproduced through the coproduction of both the notionally powerful and the powerless. In this regard, managers cannot simply be understood as agents of domination, but must also be seen as themselves being constituted through exercises of power. The responsibilization of managers through their initiation into the "technical expertise" of management is one such exercise of power.

5. CONCLUSION

On the argument which has been advanced here, the constitution of management as a technical practice is not something which should be seen simply as part of a (largely failed) project to professionalize management, or solely as an ideological project to legitimate managerial authority, but also as a way of

responsibilizing managers. It could, however, be argued that it is part of a professionalizing process within the developing "management-speak" industry of academics, trainers, consultants, and "portfolio careerists." For these, access to the recondite languages and arcane techniques of each and every business fad is the key to their continued employment. Particularly for management consultants, claims to expertise via the deployment of specialist language might be a key part of the process of presentation to clients (Clarke, 1995). Similarly, for many management academics the promotion of management as a technical practice is an extremely useful technique of classroom control in the face of insecurity about their legitimacy (Grey and Mitev, 1995, p. 81), enabling pedagogy in "expert" mode (Grey et al., 1996, pp. 98–100). As exponents of technical truths, couched in specialist language, authenticated by science, no less, such academics (who also grade the exams, of course) are able to persuade or coerce managers into acceptance of models which bear scant resemblance to reality.

None of this implies that managers do not gain considerable legitimacy and attendant rewards by virtue of the representation of management as a technical practice. Nor should one overstate the power of management academics to define the reality of management, which is certainly circumscribed by many factors. But the significance of the "management-speak industry" of which management education is a key part should not be underestimated. Furusten (1995) shows through detailed example how popular management knowledge, with all its attendant ideological baggage, has been able to become widely diffused. What is at issue is not simply the spread of an irritating vocabulary, but the attendant shifts in practices which management discourse legitimates.

Elsewhere (Grey and Mitev, 1995; Grey, 1996a; Grey and French, 1996) it has been argued that management education should not be seen as something which serves the functional needs of managers, but should expose managerial practices to critical scrutiny. The implications of the present paper are slightly different. If management education has developed "against" rather than "for" managers, it means that those management educators who conceive of their task as assisting individual managers are, even within terms of their own aspirations, mistaken. It makes the task of reconstructing management education along critical lines all the more urgent. But it also reveals the ambiguities of such a project, for the argument in this paper is that the utility and truth of the content of management education has never been its most important purpose: rather, what has mattered is to find ways both of mystifying students and of encouraging them to accept prevailing social and managerial orthodoxies.

It is important, then, that "critical" management education does not merely become some new set of mystifications to be learned by management students. Some current developments in "critical management education," such as those inspired by postmodernism (Boje and Dennehy, 1993; Chia and Morgan, 1996), which seek a reconstruction based upon notions of empowerment, difference,

flexibility, and communication, might be seen to fall into just such a trap. A similar criticism might be made of less theoretically sophisticated conceptions of a "new paradigm" for management education (Raelin and Schermerhorn, 1994). Insofar as these merely constitute ways to responsibilize and socialize students into changing understandings of "organizational needs" they are inadequate. Only when management education becomes infused with social critique will it cease to be a way of controlling managers.

Moreover, if this paper has been persuasive in its analysis of the paradox set out at the beginning, then this conclusion will no longer seem paradoxical: it may be possible for management to professionalize only if it articulates an independent and critical view of the supposedly technical character of its practice and, thereby, distances itself from those whose interests are served by the responsibilization of managers. If responsibilization is understood as an exercise of power to reproduce managers who behave in "appropriate" ways, the route to their own "empowerment" must surely lie in a refusal of those social technologies which are conducive to their conformity to managerial and organizational orthodoxies, and the task of management educators is to provide the resources for such resistance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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