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Chapter 1

Management and colonization in everyday life

Philip Hancock

Introduction

Some 60 years ago Henri Lefebvre published the first volume of his critical evaluation of the condition of everyday life in advanced capitalist economies. In it (and the further volumes that were to follow), he offered a dialectical account of the struggle between what he considered to be the rationalizing and alienating values of capitalism, and the possibilities for liberation that exist within the activities and ambitions of everyday life. In this opening chapter, taking my inspiration from Lefebvre, I adopt the category of everyday life in order to critically explore what I consider to be the increasing presence of a particularly managerial rationality within the realm of the everyday, and those cultural resources that contribute to its reproduction.

The phrase ‘the management of everyday life’ is not, therefore, simply an empirical observation. Rather it intends a critical evaluation of the presence of management – and those modes of rationality and practice which underpin it – within a number of influential cultural resources that increasingly provide the foundations of personal sensemaking and the communicative practices that structure it. This chapter not only presents a discrete argument, therefore, but also establishes a framework within which the following chapters of this collection might be read. It considers just what might be meant by everyday life, a ‘vague and vacuous term’ (Highmore, 2002: 37), as well as asking what, for the purposes of this collection, might constitute management and how they might be seen to increasingly intersect.
Rationalization and the administered society

The proposition that everyday life is subject to a range of structuring forces aligned to the rational administration of the workplace organization is not without a history. Amongst other sources it can be traced back to early twentieth-century sociology and the discipline’s approach to the socio-cultural consequences of industrial modernization. Perhaps the most influential source of this approach is to be found in the work of Max Weber. Weber’s writings on what he considered to be the rationalization of modern life, resulting from the cultural dissemination of bureaucratic practices, are central to the argument I will present here. While Weber’s attitude to bureaucratic forms of administration was more complex than is often assumed, what is clear was his unease with their impact on the more mundane aspects of people’s lives. Weber (1968: 22) envisaged a situation whereby personal creativity, judgement and the human spirit would eventually be subsumed by a bureaucratized and increasingly disciplinary regime in which society is characterized by the production of a subject who is ‘consistently rationalized, methodically trained and [oriented towards the] exact execution of the received order’. His obvious dismay at the potential consequences of such a process is aptly illustrated in one of his more often quoted reflections on what he considered to be the potential end point of this process:

It is horrible to think that the world could one day be filled with nothing but those little cogs, little men clinging to little jobs and striving toward bigger ones – a state of affairs which is to be seen once more, as in the Egyptian records, playing an ever increasing part in the spirit of our present administrative systems, and especially of its offspring, the students. This passion for bureaucracy … is enough to drive one to despair. (Weber, 1991: 78)

While central to Weber’s fears regarding social bureaucratization was the prominence of modern rationality to its functioning and systems, it was not rationality per se that concerned him, however. Rather, Weber (1964) distinguished between what he termed ‘formal rationality’, a form of decision-making which orientates itself to the calculation of the most effective means to increase the chance of success in a particular endeavour, and ‘substantive rationality’, which concerns itself with the evaluation of values and ethical norms in relation to the outcomes of the formally rational. It was, as such, the predominance of the former in society that particularly concerned him, especially its apparent tendency to subsume questions of value under what increasingly appeared to be an uncritical logic of necessity.

It was this dimension of Weber’s work that was subsequently taken up by a number of later twentieth-century academics, perhaps most notably a group of German intellectuals collectively referred to as the Frankfurt School. For the members of the Frankfurt School, Weber’s understanding of the character of formal rationality – translated in their writings into instrumental rationality – was considered to be one of the greatest threats of the twentieth century. Theodor
Adorno, one of the School’s most prominent members between the 1930s and the 1960s, referred to what he termed the emergence of an ‘administered life’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979: 35) in which the values of equivalency and instrumentality associated with instrumental rationality and the calculative concerns of capitalism, expanded into every fold of human existence. This, he argued, reduced qualitative to quantitative experience and, as economic value and an adherence to policies and procedures became the measure of all things, produced an alienation of the modern subject from even the most intimate aspects of his or her everyday lives. As Max Horkheimer, another leading member of the School, expressed it,

Just as all life today tends increasingly to be subjected to rationalization and planning, so the life of each individual, including his most hidden impulses, which formerly constituted his private domain, must now take the demands of rationalization and planning into account: the individual's self-preservation presupposes his adjustment to the requirements of the preservation of the system. (Horkheimer, 2004: 65)

Thus, drawing on Weber’s own observation that rationalization is premised on ‘the extension of formalistic quantifying reason to the phenomena of social life’ (cited Cook, 2004: 5), the Frankfurt School sought to map out such incursions in areas such as popular culture, politics and even ethics, as part of a critical project oriented towards a radical re-evaluation of the proffered achievements of modernity.

While the work of the Frankfurt School continues to be influential, as we shall shortly see, by the close of the century its critical pre-eminence had been somewhat overshadowed by the rise of various poststructuralist and postmodern schools of thought. Yet despite a range of theoretical divergences, these shared with the School’s work a number of similarities, most notably a congruent discomfort with the disciplinary and limiting effects of instrumental modes of thinking within society (cf. McCarthy, 1990). A notable instance of this can be found, for example, in Jean Francois Lyotard’s (1984) interest in the increasingly performative character of contemporary knowledge which he viewed no longer as oriented towards the goal of truth but rather that of efficiency and, ultimately, power. Similarly, Michel Foucault (1979) was concerned with the ways in which the body – amongst other things – had become subject to a regime of similarly rational discipline, while Giles Deleuze (1995) analyzed how control pervades even the most mundane aspects of people’s lives, serving not individual desires, but those of the corporations for whom they work and are ultimately accountable to.

More recently, academics associated with what is known as ‘critical realism’, a philosophical position that would generally locate itself in stark opposition to the poststructuralist worldview, have engaged in a similar critique of what is known as Rational Choice Theory (Archer and Titter, 2000) and its largely instrumental orientation to the process of public policy-making. Nor has Weber’s immediate legacy diminished in importance. Reiger (1985), for instance, has
pointed to the ways in which the influx of expert technologies into the home during the twentieth century has led to an extension of instrumental reason into the everyday management of household and personal relationships. Similarly, George Ritzer’s (1993) massively influential McDonaldization thesis has drawn our attention to the metaphorical parallel between what he considers to be an ongoing process of societal rationalization and the operations of the McDonald’s fast food restaurant.

What follows in this chapter reflects, in many respects, therefore, a continuing dialogue with the diagnosis of modern life offered by Weber and those who have drawn inspiration from him. Or to put it another way, the theme of total administration sets the scene for what is, in effect, a reimagining of Weber’s concerns regarding the rise of formal rationality within the context of the rise of modern management. Not that I consider these terms synonymous. There is much about what one might term the new managerial spirit that is clearly distinct from the characteristics of formalized reason described by Weber. This fact notwithstanding, however, the orientation to a critique of the process of societal rationalization that is to be found in Weber, his hermeneutic of suspicion to coin a phrase, is one that deeply influences the ideas and conclusions discussed here.

From administration to management

While the likes of Adorno employed the term ‘administration’ to characterize what was effectively the repression of human creativity, spontaneity and freedom, today, I would suggest, it has taken on a far more benign tone. In many respects the term administration is seen in a markedly positive light when compared with what one might consider to be its youthful usurper, namely management. In my own academic profession, for example, to describe oneself as involved in administration is to court, at worst, a slightly demeaning response, while to describe oneself as a manager is to invite, at best, derision if not outright hostility. This is because while the former tends to be associated with a relatively passive set of practices geared towards necessary systems maintenance, the latter is viewed frequently as a far more aggressive form of agenda setting and behavioural regulation.

Whatever one’s view of the character of modern management, however, there would seem to be little reason to doubt, as Boltanski and Chiapello (2006) have recently recognized, its status as an important medium for the proliferation throughout society of formal rationality. Not only that, but as the likes of Protherough and Pick (2002: vii, original emphasis) have observed, we have, for some time now, lived in an age in which managerial ideas and principles appear almost overwhelmingly ubiquitous and whereby

Every aspect of life – hospitality, friendship, eating out or caring for one’s family – ha[s] to be managed, with managerial ‘targets’ set for each part of its operation, and with league tables tabulating successes and failures.
Yet what exactly does the term management mean in such a context, and just how might it influence social relations above and beyond what one might consider to be its illegitimate sphere of not only interest, but indeed competence? Without entering into an extended discussion of the etymology of the term which can be found elsewhere (cf. Parker, 2002), the term management – along with the related terms managerial and managerialist – generally refers – one might argue – to a particular way of organizing, and deploying resources which, in principle, enable other activities to take place. To cite Parker (2002: 7), in this instance, management suggests

\[ \text{a separation between the actual doing of whatever is being managed and the higher-level function of control of these processes.} \]

With its origins in Taylor’s (1911 much cited belief in the separation of managerial conception from employee execution, this is a generic version of management that views it as a largely neutral, but nonetheless highly directive, activity.

For most people, however, there is more to management than simply an abstract process of higher-level coordination. First and foremost, managerial activity tends to be concerned not with the control and coordination of just any process, but specifically with the production, distribution and exchange of economic resources or commodities. Managerial principles and the act of management are, therefore, closely associated with the coordination of specifically capitalist business practices and a set of specific institutional arrangements congruent with these.¹ These arrangements provide both the conditions of possibility within which management might exercise its perceived function – that is, a business community – while, at the same time, generate such conditions through an assemblage of historical and cultural expectations, economic necessities, and material artefacts and resources.

Second, managerial competency is no longer simply equated with administrative skills, even within, say, the not-for-profit sector of the economy. Rather it bears a host of additional expectations, the most notable being those of leadership, and perhaps even more prominently, entrepreneurialism. Western economies during the latter decades of the twentieth century, rocked as they were by the consequences of economic downturn, industrial unrest and the gradual unraveling of the postwar consensus, grew uneasy with the limitations of a managerial identity founded on the values of safe stewardship and technocratic competence. In response, management was reformulated in what were to become more pro-active and dynamic terms. Western industry, it was argued for example, needed fewer administrators and more leaders if it was to maintain its global pre-eminence (Zaleznik, 1977; Bass, 1985; Kotter, 1990). Influential texts such as those by Kotter (1990) redefined effective management, therefore, as leadership, with its ability to provide vision, direction and indeed motivation to an organization.

Also around this period, however, while management was increasingly coming to be redefined not only as an administrative and possibly visionary function,
another discourse of managerial aspiration was exerting an increasing influence, that of the importance of entrepreneurship. While the image of the successful entrepreneur was seldom entirely disassociated from that of the great leader in the popular media, with figures such as Richard Branson and Anita Roddick both cases in point, the entrepreneurial spirit was something that was now seemingly available to all. Entrepreneurialism has even been touted as the new rock ‘n’ roll (Jones, 2005), suitable for the resurrection not only of the West’s private industries but of its ailing public sector as well (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992).

This entrepreneurial spirit is one of daring initiative and self-organization; characteristics which, in many respects, diverge sharply from those traditionally associated with the administratively orientated manager. Nonetheless, in the public perception of such matters, great managers and great entrepreneurs have come to be seen as largely synonymous, an idea increasingly formalized in the notion of the intrepreneur. Perhaps of most interest in this context, however, are observations that have been made by some of the more critical voices in the debates surrounding enterprise. Most notable amongst these is Du Gay (1996), who recognizes that at the heart of the entrepreneurial project is a concomitant process of subjectification; that is, the production of enterprising subjects who have internalized these values, and ultimately, who become what can be termed entrepreneurs of the self. That is, they eventually come to see their physical and intellectual selves also as projects; projects oriented towards the maximization of personal opportunities, financial, as well as emotional, spiritual and cultural.

Before I go any further, however, I should perhaps make it clear that none of this is to suggest that the ways in which actual managers carry out their various administrative and associated functions can itself necessarily be formulated in such terms. While, as Grey (1997) has observed, there may be some aspiration towards such a formulaic model within the pages of the management textbook, the reality of managerial lives is often more complex. Managers tend, as Watson (1994: 35) has noted, to combine the application of formalized processes and practices with an ongoing process of sensemaking and adaptation or, to put it somewhat more crudely, making it up as they go along. As such, organizational management is often a more open-ended and indeterminate activity than one might suppose. It is contingent on environmental factors – both internal and external – and the meanings the individuals concerned ascribe to them and, as such, less amenable to the application of simple, universalistic, solutions.

Nevertheless, it is not the day-to-day activities of managers that so much concern me here, but rather how the values of managerialism – as a cultural ideology – permeate and resonate with a host of socio-cultural forms and lived practices that, to a lesser or greater extent, continue to lie outside the formal domain of the workplace. For, however, management is practised within the environment of the work organization, its validating logic is one that is clearly and very publicly articulated through a range of conceptual and symbolic resources that both structure and validate its claims to authority and, increasingly, universality. As I observed above with reference to Grey (1997), the managerial ethos as exemplified in its own literature and language draws upon a host of performatively governed
imperatives of action. That is, it invokes, more often than not, the language and values of effectiveness, efficiency, measurement, achievement, control and increasingly, as I have suggested above, entrepreneurialism, as representing an unproblematic and coherent orientation to the world. Add to this the hyperbole of heroic opportunity for those who submit to its particular worldview – including the possibility that one might unlock ‘the mysteries of self-renewal’ (Pascale, 1990: 15), identify ‘the split/fix paradox’ (ibid.: 36) and ‘thrive on chaos’ (Peters, 1988) while increasingly take control of our own destinies (Handy, 1997) – and what one is confronted with is a potentially very powerful cultural, and indeed ethical, technology. One that offers a means by which the indeterminacy and unpredictability so often characteristic of everyday life might be, if not rendered fully benign, then certainly ‘manageable’.

To summarize then, what I am arguing for is an understanding of management that focuses not so much on the lived experiences of professional managers, but rather on a fundamentally ideological discourse that legitimates particular modes of engaging with, and being in the world, over others. One that directs individual decision-making and socially embedded practices towards an overriding prioritization of instrumentally orientated action, combined with an almost heroic valorization of individual entrepreneurialism, both of which are presented as a universalistic panacea in the face of the uncertainties of everyday life. Moreover, it is one that frequently evokes the language and symbolism of an idealized version of management practice – particularly the values of quantification, strategic planning and the marketing function – combined with a justificatory appeal to the efficiencies of the free market economy.

Considering everyday life

As the title of both this chapter and the book itself suggests, the question here is not one simply of management or managerialism, but of its influence on everyday life. Yet while social scientists have long been concerned with the category of the ‘everyday’, it has always been something of a contested concept. While interest in it appears to have experienced something of an upturn over the last decade or so, with books such as *The Body in Everyday Life* (Nettleton and Watson, 1998), *Music in Everyday Life* (DeNora, 2000) and *Governmentality, Biopower, and Everyday Life* (Nadesan, 2008) appealing to a broad spectrum of social scientific interests, the term nevertheless remains difficult to define and, in some instances, it is even considered symptomatic of the fallibilities of certain modes of social theorization (cf. Crook, 1998).

Despite this the category of the everyday has a well-established history, having been long associated with the phenomenological and ethnomethodological traditions within sociology,³ and specifically with figures such as Schutz (1973, 1982), Goffman (1969) and Berger and Luckman (1967). Less concerned with developing a critical account of everyday life as we are here, however, writers in
The management of everyday life

this tradition have primarily been interested in charting and making transparent the sensemaking accomplishments of people in and through their everyday interactions. As Dant (2003: 66) observes,

To generalize, this sociological tradition rejects macro-social processes as determining the form of social life and regards social actors as collectively and collaboratively responsible for creating the social worlds they live in.

Nevertheless, while it is true that this tradition has, to a lesser or greater extent, tended to focus on the intersubjectivity of everyday life, many of the underlying propositions that characterize it do resonate with a more avowedly critical approach; in particular the unavoidable significance of shared resources and cultural frameworks within which agreements to the legitimacy of certain interpretations of meaning and claims to truth might be adjudicated. As such, some reference will be made to these ideas within the context of the critical approach to the everyday I consider here.

Leaving to one side the previously discussed work of the early Frankfurt School for one moment, perhaps the most prominent figure associated with a more critical relationship to the everyday is Henri Lefebvre (1992, 2000) whom I referred to at the opening of this chapter. For Lefebvre (1992: 97 original emphasis), a French Marxist intellectual, everyday life should be viewed as that

Which is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, and their common ground … In it are expressed and fulfilled those relations which bring into play the totality of the real, albeit in a certain manner which is always partial and incomplete: friendship, comradeship, love, the need to communicate, play etc.

Yet while a champion of the need to study the contours of the mundane and everyday he was, unlike the phenomenologists, by no means an uncritical bystander. For when he spoke of the partiality and incompleteness of the everyday, as he did above, it indicates what he considered to be its essentially contested nature. For while the everyday is, in Lefebvre’s view at least, the realm of ‘authentic’ human value and agency, it nevertheless remains a mediated space; mediated, in particular, by what he termed the ‘technocratic’ (read formal or instrumental) rationality of market exchange. This is a rationality that he considered increasingly pervasive of the most intimate of our daily practices producing an alienation that is both integrating – in terms of a reified totality – and yet, at the same time, destructive of the fabric of meaningful human relationships. As he expressed it in one of his later works, Everyday Life in the Modern World, first published in 1971,

[Everyday life] is no longer the place in where human suffering and heroism are enacted, the site of the human condition. It has become an object of consideration and the province of organization; the space-time of voluntary programmed self-regulation …
For Lefebvre, therefore, it was in the everyday that the contradictions and paradoxes of an age in which human potential is both realized and retarded are increasingly played out, where the ‘dialectic of enlightenment’, as Adorno and Horkheimer (1979) termed it, is most starkly exposed.

Notwithstanding the force and insight of Lefebvre’s account what it lacked, however, was a systematic theorization of the nature of the interrelationship between the qualities he associates with the everyday and the contrasting sphere of technocratic rationality. One possible solution to this absence, however, is that to be found in the work of a contemporary critical scholar, Jürgen Habermas. While Habermas enjoys the status of one of the most prominent intellectual heirs to the work and ideas of the Frankfurt School – having worked, for instance, as research assistant to Adorno – his ideas diverge from many of those of his mentors. Of notable significance is his rejection of what he considers to be their unnecessarily totalizing vision of a society dominated by an instrumental process of rationalization. Rather, through his theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 1987), Habermas offers instead a bifurcated conception of society, comprising of what he terms the lifeworld and the system, each with its own distinct, but ultimately interrelated, mode of organizing rationality.

While not entirely reducible to the idea of everyday life employed either by the phenomenologists or by the likes of Lefebvre, Habermas’s conception of the lifeworld shares a number of important features with both of these perspectives. As it did for Schutz and Garfinkel, the lifeworld represents for Habermas (1984: 335) the backdrop to human action which is ‘the prereflective form of taken-for-granted background assumptions and naively mastered skills’. It is where consensus is pursued around values and aspirations, a process based on rational dialogue and the presumed goal of achieving truth and mutual understanding. It is this conception of the lifeworld that is subsequently contrasted with what he terms the system which now, in a vein more akin to Lefebvre’s bifurcation, refers to the sphere of ‘formal’ or ‘instrumental’ rationality whereby the values of differentiation and the rational calculation of means take precedence. Embedded primarily within the state and economy, the rationality of the system is said to orientate itself to the need for formal strategies directed at the efficient coordination of complex socio-economic relations required for the reproduction of ‘the institutional cores that define society’s “base”’ (Habermas, 1987: 173).

Unlike his Frankfurt predecessors, therefore, Habermas is not entirely antagonistic to the operation of a more formal mode of systems rationality, viewing it, as he does, as necessary to the coordination of a complex society. Ideally, for Habermas, however, such systemic activity should be governed by the values and imperatives established in and through the communicative practices of the lifeworld via what he terms steering media – most notably money and administrative power – which translate such particular expectations derived from the normative, everyday constitution of social relations into the general patterning of large-scale
economic and political transactions. Thus, formal, or instrumental, reason should ultimately be answerable to a more consensus-orientated, value-driven rationality; one that emerges from the communicative practices of the lifeworld. Yet where Habermas continues the critical tradition of his Frankfurt School predecessors is in his recognition that, under the conditions of modernity, there has been an ongoing reversal of this relationship, whereupon such aforementioned steering media act back upon the lifeworld, distorting those communicative practices through an imposition of the formal rationality which has come to characterize their functioning.

Habermas’s concern, therefore, is with the tendency of aspects of the ‘lifeworld’ to fall increasingly under the direct dominance of instrumental reason (associated with the regulation and maintenance of capitalist exchange relations). This is characterized by the ways in which the symbolic resources we employ to legitimize the intersubjective rationality of our communicative interactions are increasingly displaced by a rationality orientated not towards critique or the establishment of truth or consensus, but rather the technical control and effective deployment of economic and socio-cultural resources. Hence, in his own words,

Media such as money and power attach to empirical ties; they encode a purposive rational attitude toward calculable amounts of value and make it possible to exert a generalized, strategic influence on the decisions of other participants which bypass processes of consensus orientated communication. Inasmuch as they do not merely simplify linguistic communication, but replace it with a symbolic generalization of rewards and punishments, the lifeworld contexts in which processes of reaching and understanding are always embedded are devalued in favour of media-steered interactions. (Habermas, 1987: 183, original emphasis)

Now, it is with reference to such incursions into the communicative space of the lifeworld, incursions that distort and undermine the cultural and ethical foundations of everyday communicative practices and their critical (reflexive) potential, that Habermas attaches the term ‘colonization’. Such colonizing incursions are not, however, ‘all or nothing’ processes. As Power et al. (2003) have argued, steering mechanisms can exert their influence on the lifeworld in two ways. When acting in a regulative sense, such mechanisms can provide valuable resources and information for the communicative reproduction of the lifeworld, acting as tools so to speak. When operating in what he terms a constitutive sense, however, such mechanisms reconstitute the very structure of the lifeworld, colonizing its consensual communicative practices with structures of thought, language and action regulated by the imperatives of instrumentality and utility.

As noted above, however, Habermas does not consider this a totalizing process. For while intense periods of assault on the communicative integrity of the lifeworld may result in an increase in certain social pathologies, like Lefebvre before him, Habermas is also at pains to acknowledge the dialectical and, therefore, resistive potential of everyday life in the face of these. As such,
any such critical exploration of the everyday again shares in common with the phenomenological tradition a commitment to revealing and understanding how, in our everyday communicative practices, we may resist and challenge such colonizing processes and reassert what Habermas would consider to be apposite to lifeworld priorities.

Now, while I intend to return to this aspect of Habermas’s argument, and its limitations, towards the end of the chapter, what I want to do now is articulate the main thrust of this chapter, namely that management can itself be understood not simply as a particular manifestation of such steering media, but particularly as one that possesses significant implications for the integrity of the contemporary lifeworld. In the aforementioned work by Power et al. (2003) it is claimed that accounting, for instance, can itself be understood and analyzed in terms of its relationship to the steering media of administrative power, money and law; steering media that increasingly function in a constitutive mode within the organizational sphere. Here I want to similarly explore the proposition that management, which can also be understood in such terms, increasingly demonstrates the potential to exert a similar constitutive influence on the realm of everyday life beyond such (albeit permeable) organizational boundaries. This means that management, or at least the constitutive rationality of management, increasingly has the potential to infuse the communicative and symbolic realm of the lifeworld and, in doing so, potentially distort both everyday processes of intersubjective sensemaking and the capacity to reason beyond the parameters such a limited mode of rationality favours.

Managerial colonization

The idea that interests related specifically to corporate performance present a significant force for the colonization of the everyday is not itself a new argument. In addition to the Weberian tradition I discussed earlier, Deetz (1992), for example, has developed an extensive analysis of the ways in which corporate values and demands have – through the media, the education system and so on – increasingly colonized the public democratic sphere including family and individual identities. Yet the argument I am presenting here differs in that it is not solely the direct pursuit of corporate interests that concerns me, but rather the integration of the values and principles of modern management itself, as a self-contained and reproductive ideology, into the cultural resources that contribute to the values and practices of everyday life.

Perhaps the most visible illustration of this has been the increasing prominence of what Habermas (1987: 397) refers to as ‘expert cultures’. While the presence of a range of discourses of expertise is nothing intrinsically novel, either within organizations or society at large, what has been increasingly tangible over the last 20 years or so has been the almost direct transference of the imperatives, logics and values associated with managerial expertise, exemplified via the work...
of management consultants and various associated gurus, into cultural resources associated with the idea of ‘everyday-managing’. Now, in using this hybrid term here what I acknowledge is that it is possible to think about managing in a way that is very different to the way in which we defined management earlier. Managing in the sense of ‘everyday-managing’ is about making sense of the world and getting by in such a way that is congruent with the idea of the lifeworld; that is, as a space within which learning, negotiation and adaptation take place as an intersubjective process, one grounded in shared resources and communicative engagements. After all, as Watson (1994: 12) notes,

> to survive in the world we have to manage our situation; to meet our material needs and to stay sane we struggle to exert some control. Notice the language used here: ‘we have to manage’.

This exemplifies, I would argue, a dominance of lifeworld imperatives over systemic concerns whereby formal rationality serves the values of both survival and socially determined need. To stress the point once again, therefore, what I am concerned with here then is the reversal of this form of relationship, whereby the steering media manifest in management ideas increasingly configure the discursive and material resources and are increasingly presented as necessary for the successful maintenance of our everyday lives.

Now, in some cases this relationship between the system imperatives and techniques of management is, it has to be said, more obvious than others. Equally so, other system resources are often brought into play in order to further legitimate the universality or rigorous objectivity of its claims, such as medicalized discourses, or those of cognitive or behavioural psychology. Perhaps one particularly ubiquitous example of this inverted – in Habermasian terms – relationship is to be found on the shelves of pretty much every high street bookstore under the heading of ‘self-help’. I refer here, of course, to those books that offer us the promise of personal salvation from a host of personal ills and misfortunes through a combination of entrepreneurial, managerial and pop-psychological techniques. Take, for instance, McDermott and Shircore’s (1999) *Manage Yourself, Manage Your Life*, within which the rationality of systems management is fused with the psychologism of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), or perhaps Dryden’s (2001) invocation to *Manage Your Emotions by Controlling Your Thoughts*, in which the principles of cognitive therapy provide a direct route to the restoration of the effectively and efficiently self-managed ‘you’. Both of these titles and their contents illustrate a view of human subjectivity as something that must be closely regulated in order to ensure the individual is able to ‘maximize life opportunities’ while ‘striving for personal excellence’ and ‘achieving sustainable peak performance’.

Similarly, in the increasingly popular field of professional life coaching, which appears geared towards the pursuit of competitive advantage in a world in which other people are either obstacles or resources rather than the source of meaning and self-understanding, individual self-improvement is offered as thoroughly
amenable to such quantification. Yet the slippage from system to lifeworld is even starker than one might realize. It is not purely the rationality, language and values that, as exemplified in titles such as The 10-minute Life Coach: Fast-Working Strategies for a Brand New You (Harrold, 2002), demonstrate this, but the direct appropriation of management processes and procedures. Eileen Mulligan (1999), for example, a British ‘coach’ with a background in industry and business consultancy, offers a 7-day programme designed to improve everyday life achievements. It commences with the design and production of personal appraisal forms and questionnaires, and continues through a range of formalized tasks, including the production of a personalized mission statement. As Mulligan (1999: 30) herself ‘pitches’ it,

For some individuals, their mission statement becomes the single and most significant aspect in their life. Mother Theresa dedicated her life to God and caring for the poor. Many religious leaders have spent a lifetime in prayer and meditation, their mission being enlightenment. There is one thing for sure: having a mission in life gives you a sense of purpose.

It is, of course, difficult to disagree with the underlying sentiment being expressed here, wrapped up, as it is, in an undeniable yet essentially meaningless tautology. Such managerial ‘expert culture’ does not, however, only find popular expression through the pages of relatively specialized, if apparently banal, self-help texts and professional services. If this were the case then perhaps it would all be far less interesting.

The imperative to have a ‘mission’ in life and to manage that mission also permeates, however, the much more visible and popular media of the contemporary, and highly popular, lifestyle magazine. It is here that readers are invited to become their own life coaches, ‘inspired and motivated’ to pursue ‘instinct as the logical choice’, eat ‘mood food’, take ‘6 steps to happiness’ and so become effective and efficient managers of the self. Indeed, this burgeoning publishing genre appears fixated with management language and imperatives. For example, readers across a range of publications are encouraged to ensure that their everyday lives are brought to order, reconceptualized and then reconstructed as ‘well planned’, ‘controlled’, ‘efficient’ and ‘effective’, regularly reviewing performance and ensuring any necessary modifications or interventions are undertaken accordingly.

Headings and sub-headings such as ‘MOT Your Life: 25 point problem fixer’ (Men’s Health, April 2001: 6), ‘7 Steps to Happily Ever After’ (SHE, November 2008: 71), ‘Quality Time: 10 New Ways to Clock Off’ (Woman and Home, November 2008: 54) where a ‘top life coach’ advises on ten ways to systematically improve quality of life, ‘Calm the chaos, tame the tumult and nail down every second of your time as FHM brings order to your life in 18 easy steps’ (FHM, November 2000: 5) and ‘Finding and Keeping Friends You Need’, which requires a detailed analysis of your friendships through the production of a written ‘friendship audit’ (Psychologies, November 2008: 151) all reflect, in equally soundbite fashion, the need to embrace the self as a marketable commodity, or as
an entrepreneurial brand called ‘you’, as management writer Tom Peters (1997) put it. Within such texts, then, the self in relation to others is positioned as a managerial project to be subject to constant performance appraisal: ‘spring clean your life – career wobbles? Love traumas? Elle shows you how to go for the big clean up’ (Elle, April 2001: 7).

It is not simply to lifestyle texts that I would want to point to as illustrative of such a colonization process of contemporary cultural resources, however, despite their evident popularity. Take, in addition, the increasing importance of personal communication technologies in our everyday lives, technologies with the expressed purpose of ensuring that self-management is rendered evermore rapid, extensive and efficient. Leaving aside for one moment the almost – in this context anyhow – obsolete deskbound PC, the development and proliferation of a whole host of hi-tech devices including tablet PCs, PDAs, smartphones and even Internet-configured entertainment devices, such as Apple’s ipod touch, have increasingly sought to blur not only previous distinctions between the temporal and spatial contexts of work and leisure (cf. Towers et al., 2006), but equally distinctions between relatively spontaneous action and pre-planned, coordinated and systematically pursued activities. Thus, rather than simply meeting a friend for a meal in a restaurant that you both know, by using say a device such as the Apple iphone, you are able to identify all the relevant restaurants in your area, look up their various reviews on the web, and then call up directions to the establishment of your (their?) choice based upon this information. Guess work, spontaneity and serendipity all appear largely obsolete as organizing an intimate social occasion is rendered calculable and potentially as efficient as generating a stock inventory.

The limits of everyday management

Before I proceed further with this line of argument, however, it should be acknowledged that such developments might well not be of concern to everybody. As one might expect in a book attached to a series in critical management studies, the resources I have drawn on here inevitably encourage one to view such developments in a somewhat jaundiced light; as symptomatic of the essentially homogenizing character of market capitalism which, while appearing to offer choice and opportunity, effectively curtails the possibility of thinking outside of the market and what it chooses to make available to us. Yet as Crook (1998: 538) insists, for instance, ‘human experience is always mediated’ and, as such, it might be equally argued that such colonizations could be more fruitfully considered as the networking of resources, and judged not so much against some metaphysical yardstick of human potentiality, or the devaluing of formal rationality, but rather against the usefulness people ascribe to them (as in the case of a smartphone which enables one to book a table in a recommended restaurant).

Perhaps one important source of inspiration for such a mode of critique is the work of Michel de Certeau who, while equally concerned with the experience of
the everyday in contemporary society, certainly favours a less pessimistic reading of the conditions within which the modern subject finds himself or herself. For de Certeau, despite a shared concern with the negative impact on contemporary cultural forms of contemporary capitalism, he does not consider such an impact to be totalizing in its reach or impact. Rather, it always leaves room for what he terms ‘tactics’ (de Certeau, 1984: xii); that is, the ways in which people negotiate everyday life and, in doing so, inscribe their own meanings on place and time, and resist – sometimes through reappropriation – the kinds of colonizing rationalities of concern here.

What I would want to emphasize in response to this, however, is that it is neither my contention to deny the joy and personal advantages that might be obtained from such resources nor the existence of individual or cultural resistances by those who oppose them. Indeed, such views would be inimical to a perspective that takes seriously Lefebvre’s account of the potentialities of the everyday to offer alternatives spaces and practices of life in the face of what he considers to be the systematic production of alienation. Nor, from a Habermasian conception of the lifeworld, can it simply be reduced to a condition of homogeneous stasis if it is to be truly understood as a communicative space of intersubjectivity which, by its very nature, remains as such only if it is constantly engaged with, through a process of re-evaluation, reorientation and reconstitution. As Habermas (1987: 185, *original emphasis*) himself observes in this respect,

> We cannot directly infer from the mere fact that system and social integration have been largely uncoupled to linear dependency in one direction or the other. Both are conceivable, the institutions that anchor steering mechanisms such as power and money in the lifeworld could serve as a channel *either* for the influence of the lifeworld on formally organized domains of action, or, conversely, for the influence of the system on communicatively structured contexts of action.

Indeed, the idea that human subjectivity can ever be wholly colonized or constituted as a singular and determined entity is one that has rightly been challenged from a number of perspectives within management and organization studies and beyond. As Jones and Spicer (2005) have argued with reference to the work of Lacan, for instance, if one accepts that each subject remains in a permanent state of becoming in terms of their individual identity, that it is never finally fixed or static, then no cultural ideology – be it managerial or not – can wholly create a state of closure in terms of the dynamics of human identity and agency. Indeed, even if such theoretical claims are set aside, empirical illustrations of such ongoing everyday tactics abound. Spoof self-management books (cf. Woodhouse, 2001) and the critical reception that the directive contents of the lifestyle magazine often receives, even from those who read them (cf. Hancock and Tyler, 2004), all suggest the possibility of a critically engaged consciousness.

Practically, then, it might appear difficult in the light of what I have written above, to sustain an argument that focuses primarily on colonization by management at the expense of a consideration of possible sites of reappropriation
and resistance. Well in part this may represent a fair criticism. Yet what is important, for me at least, is the need to promote recognition of the need to at least commence questioning management’s role in how we evaluate and position ourselves in relation to the practices of our everyday lives; something that has been largely absent within the established parameters of critical management studies. Furthermore, in part my aim in this chapter has been to set the scene for the contents of this collection as a whole. I have, therefore, offered a particular theoretical orientation towards thinking about the relationship between management and everyday life; one that seeks to draw attention to the asymmetries such a relationship engenders when manifest as it is through the pages and associated cultural resources of the mass media. This is not, I stress once again, to either exaggerate the power of management or downplay the possibilities of play and resistance, but rather to identify its cultural presence as a first step towards rethinking the scope and objectives of studying management critically in the light of this.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to establish something of a backdrop to the collection as a whole. In doing so, I have drawn primarily on the critical conception of a bifurcated social totality offered by Habermas and his concern with the nature of the relationship between the instrumental logic of commodity capitalism and the everyday space of intersubjective communication and sensemaking. This has led me to argue that management represents an increasingly pervasive and, indeed, colonizing rationality; one that is having a ubiquitous influence on the content of a range of socio-cultural resources which themselves can be said to play a not insignificant role in the structuring of the landscape of everyday life. It is, therefore, an influence that transcends the confines of the work organization and the formal labour relationship, and increasingly manifests within the resources and fabrics of everyday life, oriented as it is towards the apparent amelioration of some of our most pressing personal concerns and tribulations.

It is, of course, a somewhat particular version of management that I have presented here. It combines the rationality and principles of mass administration – instrumentality, quantification, systematization and so on – with the entrepreneurial language of innovation, (self) creativity, and even courage. In doing so, it offers not only a particular view of the world, but a means by which the vagaries and challenges of modern life might be negotiated, and perhaps, ultimately, overcome. In an age defined by the aforementioned new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006), or fast subjectivities (Thrift, 2005), in which novelty, excitement and indeterminacy are the order of the day, it offers what might be seen as a highly rational settlement whereby the irrationalities produced by a system which constantly accelerates and complicates the quality of everyday life are offered – somewhat dialectically – as their own solution.
Nonetheless, however one ultimately views both the legitimacy and utility of such a viewpoint, my overriding concern in writing this chapter is not that you uncritically accept what I say. Rather it is that you take some time to reflect on these issues in your critical studies of management, and perhaps ask yourself just where does management end today and, therefore, where might a critical study of management also end? Is it at the gates of the office or the factory, or perhaps at the home of the remote worker? Or, as part of a larger critical endeavour, should it perhaps venture even further, bringing its critical gaze to bear on the flotsam and jetsam of everyday life in order to fully grasp and render transparent this apparently ubiquitous of cultural ideologies? Hopefully this, and the chapters that follow, will provide you with a starting point when it comes to asking such questions as well as encourage you to think of new ones that are still to be asked.

Notes

1. By ‘arrangement’, I am not simply referring to a particular hierarchical configuration of offices or a division of labour within the context of an organizational structure, but rather a complex patterning of discursive and practical logics underpinned by a series of both tacit and explicit agreements as to their utility and socio-cultural legitimacy.


3. The philosophical foundations of these interpretive approaches are to be found largely in the phenomenological philosophy of Hegel (1977) and Husserl (1970) and their conceptions of the intersubjective constitution of reality and the lebenswelt or ‘life-world’, respectively.

4. In the US, where many of these books are first published, sales continue to be more than healthy. In 2007, for instance, the US market in self-help books was estimated to be worth around $600 million (Loomis, 2008).

5. Echoing the one best way of Taylor, here the crude quantification and pseudo-scientific rhetoric (the discipline of ‘positive psychology’) is accompanied by an imperialistic universalism that allows the authors to claim that ‘This new discipline demonstrates that the same basic principles about happiness apply to virtually everyone, across all age groups, nationalities and cultures’ (Stauth, 2004: 37).

6. See also Hancock and Tyler’s (2001) argument in relation to Hegel’s philosophy of recognition.

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Management and colonization in everyday life


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