4. The changing practice and sociological study of management control

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers how sociologists have addressed the issue of management and its role in the control of work. Many critical sociology of work scholars have, rightly, focussed their interest on the agency of workers in the face of organisational and systemic contexts. In this there has sometimes been a reluctance to consider what the self-declared objectives of those managers who impose conditions upon workers may be. This is partly understandable. The content of managerial agendas comes not from sociological sources, but from protagonists ranging from business consultancies, management 'gurus' and business school academics from sub-disciplines often associated with 'strategy' or 'operations'. But while such agendas originate from such sources, when put into practice, they become sociological upon contact with workers who are subject to the consequences of those ideas.

This chapter considers some of those more influential managerial ideas presented over time and considers how sociologists have dealt with those ideas. The chapter proceeds as follows. First a brief overview of what management is and its role and position in the frontier of control of work in organisations. This is followed by an overview of the major managerial agendas over time. This is followed in turn by an overview of how sociologists have engaged with these trends. Major approaches include industrial relations, labour process theory and critical management studies traditions. Consideration is then made of more recent managerial discourses and 'fads' and how sociology has engaged with these discourses before summarising where this may leave us now and what may follow for sociologists of work in relation to an understanding of management.

MANAGEMENT AND THE FRONTIER OF CONTROL

'Management' is a somewhat taken-for-granted idea. But it is worth unpacking in order to separate the aspects of management that are of interest in this chapter. Management can be a synonym for 'administration' and as such can be argued to have been around since ancient times: *things* need to be managed. Management can also be seen as an outcome of the division of labour and of bureaucracy, as a natural consequence of organisations as collective entities. Management can also, however, be described as those people within an organisation that occupy a distinct hierarchical position – separate from others with a specific purpose. Finally, management can be seen as a process: it is something that is done. Sociologists of work are interested in the latter three of these manifestations of management: the distinct position and role of this group of people within organisations, the agendas they pursue and in whose interests. Thus, for sociologists of work, managers' roles in the administration of *things* may be of

low concern; the administration of *people* and of *work* is fundamental. In practice, however, the management of things (the deployment of technology, for example) may well cross over into the management of people. While it would be true to say that attributes *associated* with management (power, authority, leadership, control, resource allocation, etc.) could be identified as features within organisations in any historical context, the concept of management as a formal process, or as the status of particular individuals within an organization, is a product of bureaucracy under capitalism.

Analysing management is claimed by many disciplines, including psychology, economics and political science. The focus for sociologists' interest in management has tended to be the issue of power and the *frontier of control* that exists between managers and those that are managed. It should also be noted that the interest in management, by sociologists, has also been a product of wider changes in the academy. Sociology, as an academic discipline, has fragmented in the academy. Sociologists find themselves, variously, in criminology departments, in healthcare departments and in business schools, at least as much as they might find themselves remaining in sociology departments. In the UK, from the 1980s, sociology came under attack from governments funding universities, being seen as a discipline with an alleged inherent left-wing bias. Over this time, the popularity of sociology declined as a subject of study, while simultaneously the populist appeal of everything 'entrepreneurial' saw a rise in the popularity of business studies. Specialists in the sociology of work migrated to what had previously been 'professional' or 'administrative studies' departments and now rebranded as 'business schools'. Business degrees needed expertise in *human resource management* (a term then newly imported from the US as a replacement for 'personnel management' and 'industrial relations') and in organizational behaviour (the latter having a more psychology-oriented focus).

A settled position in the 2020s is that scholarship in the sociology of work field is much more likely to be being conducted in business schools than in traditional sociology departments. While the rationale for this migration was defensive, sociologists can also now claim to have infiltrated aspects of the business school research agenda and curriculum with a more reflexive and critical view of 'business' than was the case in the early 1980s. Where a dominant narrative for business school education in the 1980s could confidently be asserted to have been dominated by the normative values of entrepreneurship, deregulation and a celebration of capitalism, this is supplanted in the 2020s with agendas such as equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability, decolonisation and (anti-utilitarian) business ethics. This takeover should not be overstated, however. While those with a sociological orientation have no doubt led these changes, the reciprocal is also true: sociologists in business schools need to justify their work on instrumentalist grounds as being socially useful to 'business', and there are cases where critical sociologists in the field of work and employment have suffered backlash where it has overstretched its claim (Parker, 2021). It is in this context that this chapter explores the relationship between the sociology of work and the study of management. Before sociologists' analysis of the content of these managerial agendas can be considered, however, those managerial agendas must themselves be explored in historical context.

The Development of Discourses on 'Managing Work'

Business studies students will be familiar with a broad sweep of managerial approaches to how work and workers are to be managed from studying organizational behaviour or equivalent. Conventionally, it would be presented along the following lines. First, F.W. Taylor (1911) pioneered the notion of management as a 'scientific' endeavour. Taylor's emphasis was on the need for a strict assertion of the managerial prerogative to determine the design of working practices, using measurement and incentives. Without managerial control, workers would tend toward 'systematic soldiering'. Then we see the emergence of the 'human relations' school from the late 1920s, associated with the likes of Elton Mayo and his famous Hawthorne experiments. Here, the Taylorist assertion of managerial prerogative, as needing to be fully separated from any notion of worker autonomy, is replaced by the idea that harnessing the worker's discretion in how they engage with their work environment will lead to more productive outcomes. What is clear at this point is that we see the first indication of a distinction between whether managerial control over worker behaviour is best achieved through means of exerting power through hierarchy and bureaucracy or through subjectivity and consent. This theme and these questions would return within the analysis of managerial agendas and within the sociological critique that would follow.

Taylor's scientific management was based predominantly on how work should be organised and the agency of the worker, judging from how Taylor himself articulated his case, was crudely expressed. He had a low estimation of a worker's intrinsic value as a human agent, of a worker's motivation and what a worker could contribute independently of managerial control. It is useful to note, however, that in its time, scientific management was seen as the definitive method for modernizing production and with potentially 'progressive' aims. It claimed, for example, the mutual benefits of such a system and emphasised collectivist effort over individualism. Converts to Taylorism included Vladimir Lenin, who saw it as the model for early Soviet industrialization. It was also taken up by progressive employers such as philanthropist-industrialist Seebohm Rowntree in England, through promotion by the likes of Oliver Sheldon (1924, 1925).

TRENDS IN SOCIOLOGICALLY ANALYSING MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

The sociological study of how management exerts control over labour has changed over time although, interestingly, not in lock-step with the managerial trends being analysed. For sociologists, the emphasis was on being 'critical', which needs some unpacking here. In some social science disciplines, such as organizational psychology (Godard, 2014) or labour economics (Kaufman, 2010), 'critical' can be taken in a positivist sense: that of impassionate 'objective' assessment of falsifiable hypotheses which could be in the form of aiding management in its attempt to solve problems. While contemporary sociologists' work tends to be critical *of* management, its contribution has not always been; and nor has its contribution always been 'progressive'. It was Ford's 'sociological department', established at the Highland Park factory in 1914, that investigated the private lives of Ford employees to ensure they were not in breach of the founder's beliefs in (anti-)unionization, personal cleanliness, and opposition to women being employed by the company once married (Hooker, 1997). More recently, however, being

'critical' in the study of management control by sociologists has tended to mean taking a sceptical view of the assumption that 'management', as an idea and an entity, is automatically rational, benevolent and unchallengeable.

It won't be a surprise for readers of a sociology handbook to find that conceptualizing management control will start chronologically with Marx and Weber. In truth, while Karl Marx wrote about ownership, control and the labour process under the capitalist mode of production in the nineteenth century, there was little in the way of formalized, rationalized 'management' of any recognizable form at the time of his writing. However, the influence of Marx's analysis more generally did have an impact on subsequent – particularly from the 1970s – theorizing. Max Weber's influence in the early twentieth century was, in contrast, immediate and presented ideas now firmly embedded, on the legal-rational nature of bureaucracy, of occupational status and how power relations are mediated through differing motive bases of 'leaders'.

Industrial Relations Approaches

What could reasonably be claimed to be the earliest sociological approach to the issue of management control over labour was the sub-discipline of industrial relations (IR). Here a key theme is workers challenging management via trade unions. IR also contains a heuristic quality concerning values about how workplaces should be (see Kaufman, 2008). Thus the Webbs were early pioneers of studying the processes of collective bargaining from their Fabian socialist perspective in the UK (Webb and Webb, 1897), while John R. Commons' contribution, from a US perspective in the 1930s, was one of a moral case for unions' role in society (Chasse, 2018).

While IR is an imperfect category of scholarship, being part sociology, part psychology, part political science and part labour economics, it had been established as a discipline capable of studying the 'frontier of control' in the form of trade union activities in the workplace and the economy more widely. As an indication of IR's early academic legitimacy, the *British Journal of Industrial Relations* was established in 1963 and the (US) *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* in 1947. The British Universities Industrial Relations Association (BUIRA) was in its 74th year when it held its annual conference in 2024. These predate most management and human resource managment (HRM) journal titles and conferences by a considerable timeframe.

The IR tradition focusses on the (managerial) 'frontier of control' (Fox, 1974). More recently 'employment relations' has been used as a preferred term, for the reason that 'industrial' implies a 'factory' workplace assumption, which is misleading (see Mustchin and Hodder 2024 for a further discussion of these terms). In addition, while IR focusses on the issues of workplace conflict, it is recognized that sociologists outside the IR tradition have considered the issue of workers' behaviour (and, indeed, misbehaviour) from at least the 1950s (e.g. Roy, 1953; Mars, 1982; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999).

The IR focus concerns the extent to which the frontier of control can be observed in systems, structures and practices. From its outset the predisposition of IR scholarship is the idea that control over work in organisations is contested between employers and workers, collectively, in the form of trade unions. So IR has been concerned with the structures and processes of collective bargaining. In its earlier form, from the Fabian socialist ideal, IR was also offering a heuristic in the form of promoting industrial democracy that might form the basis on which 'the new society' would be built. From the post-World War II era, this changed. IR

now became a discipline that could help solve the 'problem of order'. Post-WWII scholars sought to identify rational approaches to managing the frontier of control: management by consent meant an adherence to pluralism in decision-making (management's recognition of, and engagement with, unions). This further broke down into understanding negotiation on the basis of sub-processes, such as distributive bargaining, integrative bargaining, attitudinal restructuring and intra-party bargaining (Walton and McKersie, 1965).

This focus on how to better institutionalise pluralism was a predominantly Anglo-Saxon problem, with its inherited tradition of a 'collective laissez-faire' approach to the (absence of) state regulation of IR processes at this time (Kahn-Freund, 1954). Such approaches came under challenge from the 1960s, however, where collective agreements negotiated at top level faced a 'shop floor revolt' from below. In the UK, the government-initiated Donovan Commission was established to investigate this 'shop floor revolt' and propose reforms. This fed into an era-defining shift in the rationale for state involvement in how IR would be managed at firm level. Future statutory regulation for union management relations shifted Kahn-Freund's previous assertion of minimalist state involvement in the autonomy of the managerial prerogative. It also established a key conceptual framework for the future study of IR via the work of one of the commission authors, Alan Fox. Fox's (1966; 1974) framing provided a language for understanding managerial ideological predispositions to the 'frontier of control' issue. The 'rational' management approach assumed by established Oxford School IR academics was pluralism, which contrasted with the more common (in practice) managerial predisposition of managers towards a unitary – later unitarist – ideology (Heery, 2016). The unitarist managerial ideology opposes trade unions' presence in the workplace on the grounds that they 'interfere' with the management-worker relationship. Unions are, further, identified as being an illegitimate third party, driven by either partisan ideological motives or narrow sectional interests, interfering with the otherwise 'natural' order of the employment relationship, which is deemed harmonious because it is voluntary. Conflict in the workplace is deemed to be the result of either the pathology of hostile individuals (the union activist) or management's message not being communicated effectively (because of union counter-narratives). The 'Donovan era' was the high point of IR pluralism in the academic discipline and stretching institutionally into state policy. The ill-fated 'In Place of Strife' government white paper was explicit about this in the foreword, stating that "[t]here are necessarily conflicts of interests in industry. The objectives of our industrial relations system should be to direct the forces producing conflict towards constructive ends" (Castle, 1969, p. 5).

The 1970s saw change. A breakdown in the general post-WWII consensus witnessed a growth in union-initiated action almost everywhere. The pattern of conflict was different to that of the 1960s, however. Strikes were now defensively oriented 'siege strikes' rather than the 'wildcat' strikes of the 1960s: a response to the global shift away from the protectionism of the Keynesian, Bretton-Woods post-war economic settlement into what we would now recognize as a more globalized world order – or a post-Fordist one in other definitions (see below).

IR scholarship became a more contested space conceptually from the 1970s as pluralists of the Oxford school began to be challenged by more radical schools of thought. This was initiated by Fox and his identification, not only of unitarist management, but also of a more radical pluralism pursued by workers and unions, even where management operated a pluralist orientation. But the bigger challenge came from more radical interpretations of crisis during this period and this became a major challenge to the dominance of academic pluralism. Influential writers of this tradition included Marxist writers such as Richard Hyman

(1988; 1989), and John Kelly (1998), among others, while others still, especially Paul Edwards (1986), taking a 'materialist' and critical realist, if not a Marxist interpretation of workplace conflict (Edwards, 2014; Edwards and Hodder, 2022). A common thread in writers from this period was the identification of workplace conflict, far from being aberrant, as being built into the employment relationship, and that it is the suppression of conflict in this relationship that better defines the true nature of management. The dynamics of union-management relations, the power resources held by each side and the ability to deploy those resources was to be understood through this lens. In short, the understanding of how and why strikes happen.

Ackers (2011), whilst fiercely critical of Marxist IR, identifies this as a healthy period for IR scholarship – and one that was characterized by the discipline's increasingly sociological approach, thanks to both pluralists such as Hugh Clegg and Marxists such as Hyman. But as strong as IR scholarship had become, it could not credibly continue on this trajectory when the landscape of IR changed significantly, evidenced in the fact of union decline in terms of power and influence from the 1980s. The empirical reality in Britain was that measuring union influence in terms of membership, the scope and scale of collective bargaining, the incidence of strike activity and the lobbying power of unions over public policy, unions lost significant power between 1980 and the mid-2010s. This pattern was repeated in all developed nations. Reasons for this have been debated over the entire period of that decline and range from deindustrialization, globalisation, hostile government policy and neo-unitarist management, through to unions' own complacency in failing to reproduce new generations of members and activists (Frege and Kelly, 2003). Neoliberalism is the short answer. With unions in decline, IR ceases to be the influence it once was, despite some credible claims to its continued importance to the study of workplace relationships (Hodder and Martinez-Lucio, 2021). For Kaufman (2008), this all points to a reappraisal of what IR has become, in contrast to its origins. Kaufman argues that the 'original' IR paradigm centred on the employment relationship, whereas 'modern' IR became dependent on the exclusive focus on unions and labour–management relations. With the change in fortunes for those institutions that formed the framework of analysis (be they pluralist or other) 'modern' IR should now be displaced in favour of a return to IR's 'original' basis of analysis.

The Labour Process Tradition

Overlapping with the rise in this more sociological IR in the 1970s was the origins of a separate tradition that would come to be identified as Labour Process Theory (LPT) and an accompanying Labour Process Debate (LPD). In 1974, Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* was published and had a parallel impact as that of Fox's *Beyond Contract* in IR published at around the same time (Cullinane, 2024). Braverman's thesis was based on Marx's analysis of how capitalism reproduces itself in the social organization of work. In Marx's own time, workplace relationships were not mediated by any rationalized layer called 'management'; workplace discipline was imposed by overseers and ultimately the logic of the market and 'the tendency for the rate of profit to fall'. Workers were immiserated and their work degraded by the continuous search for productivity gains. Braverman reintroduced this workplace-level aspect of Marx's analysis of capitalism and analysed how the specific introduction of Taylorism through the twentieth century had led to a continuous process of deskilling.

Braverman did not live to contribute to the ensuing debate that this book initiated. A key point which separated Braverman's argument from, for example, the Marxist IR approach,

was that Braverman analysed the nature of management's agenda in the design of work, not in its engagement with unions or workers directly. The appeal of Braverman to many in the earliest stages of the LPD was that it challenged the commonly held notion that working conditions had steadily progressed over the course of the twentieth century, aided by more sophisticated management and by technology. On the contrary, technology, for Braverman, is used consistently to separate the skill and knowledge associated with a job and transfer those aspects, incrementally, into the hands of Taylorist management. It is not so contentious an argument, as Taylor made exactly this point, although expressed in terms of removing the capacity of workers' 'systematic soldiering'. Braverman also dismissed the parallel interventions of 'human relations' practices operating alongside:

> The successors to Taylor are to be found in engineering and work design, and in top management; the successors to Munsterberg and Mayo are to be found in personnel departments and schools of industrial psychology and sociology. Work itself is organized according to Taylorian principles, while personnel departments and academics have busied themselves with the selection, training, manipulation, pacification, and adjustment of 'manpower' to suit the work process so organized. Taylorism dominates the world of production; the practitioners of 'human relations' and 'industrial psychology' are the maintenance crew for the human machinery (Braverman, 1974: 87)

The debate that ensued embraced Braverman's critical view of management and the challenge to the complacently optimistic view of 'progress' in workplaces over the twentieth century. But it also generated disagreement on a number of points (see Willmott et al., 1985; Wood, 1982 for a summary of these early debates). There were criticisms of the over-estimation of the class consciousness of those previously 'skilled workers', of the apparent passivity of the newly deskilled workers, of the definitions of skill and skill formation and the lack of agency and possibilities of resistance within Taylorised work systems.

The LPT Split and the Emergence of Critical Management Studies

The most significant schism that emerged from the LPD was the split with what would later become the advocates of critical management studies (CMS). As early as 1993 Hugh Willmott was exploring the missing dimension in LPT, which was the issue of worker subjectivity. Contrary to Braverman's dismissal of the mere legitimation role played by the 'human relations' school of HR, the management of culture is seen as critical by the likes of Willmott (1993) because in service work – far more prominent a sector in Global North economies than manufacturing – the point of production and the subjective aspects of the worker identity occurs simultaneously.

This was the point where what became identified as a distinct CMS split from LPT and the conceptual departure between the two could be defined as being

1. LPT remains rooted in materialist analysis of the motivations of managers while CMS considers management behaviour being motivated by dominating culture and attitudes
2. LPT is derived mainly from Marxist concepts, while CMS draws on poststructuralist thinkers, especially Foucault and Lacan
3. CMS opposes dualism; LPT remains dualist either in Marxism or more recently under critical realism

4.   LPT remains focused on the dynamics and logics of capitalism and of class while CMS puts equal emphasis on the dynamics of patriarchy, racism and heteronormativity

The debate intensified by a series of studies on call centres was the earliest indication of the coming split between LPT and what became CMS. Call centres attracted the interest of LPT advocates because they seemed to be the logical extension of Braverman's observation that, in his study, Taylorism expanded from deskilling in manufacturing, through the capstan lathe, to deskilling in clerical work through the word processor. The call centre seemed to be automating and deskilling the notion of customer service operations and sales; previously the domain of the roaming company rep. For the emerging CMS scholars, the central issue was the harnessing and incorporation of worker subjectivity as the critical means of control.

In 1992, Sewell and Wilkinson studied quality management in a manufacturing setting and applied Foucault's (1977) concept of the 'panopticon' acting as a means of self-discipline as a system of total control. Foucault's application of the panopticon is based on the nineteenth-century Benthamite notion of prison design whereby prison cells were arranged in such a way as to be visible at all times from a central viewing position. Prisoners were aware that they were viewable *at any time* but not able to know if they were being viewed *at any one time*. Prisoners therefore behave as if they were under continuous surveillance and discipline themselves. This powerful idea – a more totalizing notion of managerial power over worker autonomy than could be envisaged under Taylorism – gained much traction by sociologists in the 1990s.

The panopticon concept was applied, first, to the just-in-time (JIT) system from the post-Fordist manufacturing regime. Fernie and Metcalf (1997) then picked up on this in their study of a call centre – a newly emerging workplace scenario at this time. Taylor and Bain (1999), in their own (LPT) study, rejected the totalising nature of the claim, instead arguing that management were far from omnipotent and that workers would always 'find a way' to bypass or resist management oversight – as they had under Taylorism.

One aspect of Braverman's early assertion of managerial control that warranted further thought was the assertion that the work regime was the only concern and that the legitimation functions of (for example) HR activities were peripheral. The earliest re-appraisal of this was from Burawoy (1979) whose Marxist analysis of American manufacturing put great emphasis on the hearts-and-minds aspect of (what we would now call) human resource practitioners in order to 'produce consent' among the workforce but also through a collusion with the individualised 'making out' coping strategies workers used to distract themselves from the mundanity of the working day, as described by Roy (1953). The idea of harnessing consent (legitimation) has a long history within Marxism, so this was not an entirely new intervention. But the idea of controlling the subjective nature of work becomes more than a mere supporting activity when the work being managed is in itself a subjective transaction.

In 1983, Arlie Hochschild's *Managed Heart* was published, in which the work of airline cabin crew was studied. The nature of cabin crew labour is that of physical work but, most importantly, that of 'emotional labour' – interacting with customers in a physically constrained environment. At the centre of this encounter was the clash between the expectations of what the service performance required as being the job in itself (friendliness, charm) and the emotions actually felt (stress, anxiety, resentment), especially when dealing with 'difficult customers'. This cognitive dissonance leads to psychological damage. Hochshchild's notion of 'surface' versus 'deep' acting in this situation was taken forward into other service

contexts, not least those of call centre operatives needing to perform and frontline public service workers.

From the point where CMS broke with LPT, accusations from each side contained the allegation that the other side is insufficiently 'critical'. Of course, what constitutes 'critical' is central to teasing out what this argument is about. Hancock (2008) notes that while CMS is broadly poststructuralist, that is, in itself, a wide field and that while some fragmentation within CMS could be seen as weakness, it could also be a strength when compared to the "rigidly patrolled borders of LPT" (p. 11). Knights and Vurdubakis (1994), among others, assert that LPT cannot be critical because their epistemological position allies them to Cartesian dualism, which is then further countered by Ackroyd and Thompson (1995) who question whether rejecting dualism results in collapsing opposition to managerial control as being *part* of managerial control and rendering resistance as impossible. Once the split was formal, Hassard et al. (2001) place CMS as those who had resigned themselves to the demise of the left – in terms of the labour movement and its associated intellectual project.

CMS is now a large grouping and has conceptual variations within. Jones (2009) sums up well how the association of the 'poststructuralism' in CMS with the variety of predominantly French theorists writing at a particular time as being a 'placeholder' term. Debate remains healthy in both LPD and CMS, and they both extend their area of interest beyond the analysis of management. LPT debates more recently acknowledge the absence of political economy – more recently in discussing global production networks as determinants of workplace relations (Taylor et al., 2015). In CMS, there has been some reflection on some de-coupling of research conducted under the guise of CMS from its origins (Spicer and Alvesson, 2024)

CHANGING MANAGEMENT DISCOURSES AND FADS

The sociological debate on the management of control has, on the one hand, tended to universalist presentations of systems and practices (whether the source or subject being capitalism, bureaucracy, union resistance or other) but, on the other, has moved forward based on newly observed changes to the settings in which theory has been generated (e.g. from an auto factory to a call centre to an inter-personal customer encounter). This raises the issue of how management approaches have themselves changed over time and how sociologists should treat these apparent 'fads'.

While the early sociological examinations of managerial control tended to be universalist and focused on capitalism as a unified system and logic, this shifted. Fordism, being a combination of Taylorism with large-scale mass production, was being used as a descriptive phrase for the stage of capitalism associated with Henry Ford's Highland Park factory. Antonio Gramsci was using 'Fordism' in his Marxist analysis as a term in his Prison Notebooks (Hoare and Smith, 1971). During the period of economic crisis in the 1970s, Fordism, as a system, was now being presented as more than just a production system. For the emerging 'regulationists', following Aglietta (1979), Fordism was defined as a total 'mode of regulation' incorporating the production regime in combination with the financial, consumption, welfare and the associated labour regulation systems at state level. Since Aglietta's placing of Fordism as a system breaking down, the issue was whether the emerging system would be a 'neo-Fordism' or a 'post-Fordism'. For the more influential post-Fordists, the emerging system would entail not just a breakaway from the dystopian model of Taylorist workplace repression, constrained

civil rights and one-size-fits-all welfare entitlement, but also those working class institutions that maintained an equilibrium under Fordism: large-scale union involvement in the factory and in politics. In these 'new times' workplace regimes would be small-scale, flexible and potentially more democratic (Murray, 1989). That period could have been, for those post-Fordists, the opportunity to seize this progressive alternative model of industrial restructuring rather than merely opposing change as the manifestation of 'Thatcher's Britain' that emerged after the year-long miners' strike of 1984–5 (Hall and Jacques, 1989). While there were some differences in theoretical groundings and motivations, the post-Fordist interpretations found synergy with those advocating for 'flexible specialisation' (Piore and Sabel, 1984). Either version was considered with great scepticism by those still pursuing the IR or LPT approaches.

In retrospect, while the debates sparked by the post-Fordists in the 1980s and 1990s faded and while the conceptual grounding on which they based their predictions remained contested, there was some truth in their observations that changes were taking place in workplaces – at least in Britain and in parallel across Europe and North America. Whether or not this had all been due to the breakdown of Fordism is another matter. The system operating the global economy from the post-WWII Bretton Woods settlement was morphing into a more multi-polar world in which the location of production was shifting to the Global South. We now call this neoliberalism.

If this 'grand narrative' approach to changing models of control within workplace relations seems more conceptual and abstract, other approaches have looked at how managerial agendas – mostly dismissed by Braverman and others – played out at workplace levels and may not have been so random, or faddish, in their emergence as they first appear. Claimed 'fads' over time included the intense interest in total quality management (TQM) from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s (see Wilkinson and Wilmott, 1995) and employee 'empowerment' (see Cunningham et al., 1996). While some managerial initiatives seem to have had more concrete 'operational' bases which have transcended fashion. For example, JIT remains a description of specific methods of manufacturing and distribution. But others have come with more normative claims beyond the description of techniques and these have not been so resilient. Contemporaneous with JIT were 'Japanisation', 'lean' production and business process re-engineering. These were less resilient as transformative managerial concepts over time. But also, as the structure of the economy shifted over time and production in the Global North moved to the Global South, to be displaced with a greater focus on services.

This period also saw those from the IR tradition embarking on debates as to the displacement of 'personnel management' – traditionally the face of management facing unions – with HRM. While personnel management was identified as being fraught with contradictions (Legge, 1978; Watson, 1977), the 'new' HRM being imported from America was first seen as normatively different to 'personnel' in its assertive 'strategic' intent, therefore identified as being essentially unitarist and insufficiently independent of senior management and its drive for shareholder supremacy (Kochan, 2007). Over time, however, HRM came to be accepted as a more descriptive term and ceased to be seen exclusively as a 'project' (Legge, 2005). So while debate on whether HR's impact on worker welfare is benign or sinister has subsided somewhat, debate continues on the degree of authority the HR function has, in relation to other managerial functions, over the regime of control (Roper and Higgins, 2020).

For Barley and Kunda (1992), the change in approach to managerial control regimes over time has a pattern. They argue that trends can be observed, from the earliest emergence of management, as an almost dialectical process of cycles alternating between the assertion of

control by 'rational' measures and control by persuasion, consent and 'hearts and minds'. Thus, nineteenth-century paternalist philanthropism was displaced by scientific management which was, in turn, displaced by socio-technical systems in the 1960s and then by what they term 'the organizational culture movement' from 1980. For each period a form of growth-maturity-decline-displacement cycle occurs. If this were held true, this would leave us, in 2024, in the period where we could now consider ourselves to be in the death spiral of the culture-inspired normative cycle. Yet no new 'rational' paradigm appears on the horizon. But perhaps it may not be coming from the places where such trends had been set previously.

With all the emphasis of mid-twentieth-century workplace sociology being framed around Fordism, it is perhaps understandable that most of the empirical studies were conducted in automobile factories. Classic ethnographic examples being Beynon (1973) in the UK and Kamata (1983) in Japan. Studs Terkel's US-based classic in 1974 while covering many workplace settings, contained many from the automotive sector. With the workplace changes associated with the deindustrialization of the 1980s, there was, perhaps, a delay in sociology keeping up, empirically, with these changes. So many continued this approach in automotive production with studies on how the Japanese auto production system represented the perfection of *high*, *neo-* or *post*-Fordism; and the extent to which JIT production (Oliver, 1991) or 'lean production' constituted a new level of work intensification (Parker and Slaughter, 1990). By the 1990s, however, the sectoral bias for studying work regimes in manufacturing had shifted. In parallel with the theoretical debates spanning LPT and IR, newer interest was placed on the experience of managerial agendas on workers in public services (for IR because they were unionized) and in call centres (latterly 'customer contact centres') because they provided a location to debate the nature of surveillance regimes in the LPD.

For the public services work focus, studies began to emerge on the way that work was being managed – often characterised as professional in nature – as a new frontline of the desire to marketise the nature of the service encounter. This encompassed an engagement with the narrative of 'new public management' (Hood, 1991) – or by its critics as 'managerialism'. Though the term managerialism was coined by Burnham in 1942 (1962), by the 1980s it was being considered more in the context of large-scale 'reforms' of the seeming dysfunctionality of public sector bureaucracy. Pollitt (1990) defines managerialism within the context of early 1980s public sector restructuring in the UK and US as a displacement of 'public administration' through replacing rules-based bureaucracy and professional discretion with cost-centre oriented managerial authority, systems and measurable processes – particularly those associated with managing quality. On this, there were some parallels with what was being considered more generally. Quality management was initially seen as something imported from manufacturing – like Taylorism before it – but later being considered as equally about initiatives to change attitudes, as it was about redesigning work processes. There was, in the examination of control in public services, some initial confluence between IR (the frontier of control, plus union presence) and LPT (removal of worker autonomy, marketization). This was later joined by 'the second wave' of CMS (Spicer and Alvesson, 2024) where the emphasis is strongly on the issues of culture, meaning and subjectivity and how these are managed and controlled.

CONCLUSION: CONCEPTUALISING MANAGERIAL CONTROL

The sociological study of managerial attempts to control work has been debated at least as much as the managerial initiatives which sociology has investigated. There are many dimensions to these debates. But a lasting debate is dealing with the power that managers are deemed to hold within the narratives, agendas and initiatives they might claim to be enforcing. There are those sociological approaches that consider managerial agendas at face value and assess their efficacy. These compare to those approaches that consider the rhetoric of a managerial agenda on its own terms but evaluate it on the basis of how such initiatives are implemented, where inconsistencies arise, then further compare those rhetorics and actions to outcomes and again consider unintended consequences or contradictions. These would fall under most IR approaches (where union opposition to managerial imperative is often the focus of study). More recently, some within the LPT adopt neo-institutionalist approaches (where the gap between rhetoric and reality are) and also within LPD we find critical realism which may or may not be compatible with Marxist approaches (see Vincent and Thompson, 2010 and Brown, 2014).

All of these contrast with those approaches more associated with CMS, which have been inspired, variously, by a variety of what could be framed as poststructuralist thinkers. The emphasis here has not been so much considering the managerial rhetorics versus reality, but rather the internal inconsistencies within the managerial rhetorics themselves, revealing another reality not consciously intended by their protagonists.

In terms of future trends, the sociology of management control will follow the managerial trends in the issue of control. Where these managerial trends will go is not predictable. In one formulation (Barley and Kunda, 1992) the current preference for cultural approaches will be displaced by rationalism. A further observation is that there is an alternative to technology making management more metric-focussed and that is the somewhat paradoxical notion that it may be that the management input into the function of monitoring and control may itself be displaced by technology, in the form of algorithms and artificial intelligence. This is the logic, for example, in systems such as Mechanical Turk and Uberisation.

For sociological developments, the three approaches identified here continue to operate in their own milieu: IR focusses on union activity; LPT maintains a materialist focus on workplace power relations; and CMS maintains its focus on culture, subjectivity and identity. There is some cross-fertilisation between IR and LPT but the prospect of similar cross-fertilization between LPT and CMS seems remote – despite both making valuable insights into how control is exercised.

This chapter has considered the sociological analysis of management control. There will inevitably be overlaps with other chapters in this sense. There are also intersectional issues (relating to identity, resistance, oppression) which are important overlaps that are not directly mentioned. But the overall aim is to present how control has been conceptualised by sociology of work writers, and this has required taking seriously those managerial initiatives that have warranted investigation. It has clearly not been a simple issue of identifying a single process of how capitalism leads to one universal trajectory. It has also been important to recognise that 'control' within an organisation in a capitalist labour process is not neutral.

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