Hugh Willmott 2003

Renewing *Strength:* Corporate Culture Revisited

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Renewing *Strength:*
Corporate Culture Revisited

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The management of corporate culture is explored through a series of reflections upon literature that has fashioned and addressed this field. Specifically, the article considers the motivation, key elements and continuing relevance of the critique made in "Strength is Ignorance; Slavery is Freedom" (Willmott, 1993) where, by pointing to their incipient totalitarianism, the ethics of "Excellence" philosophies and their culture change programmes were questioned. The analysis offered in "Strength" is shown to have continuing relevance for the contemporary examination of developments characterised as "post-bureaucracy"; and this claim is illustrated by reference to current pronouncements on "The End of Management".

INTRODUCTION

What prompted the writing of *Strength* (Willmott, 1993)? Reconstructing motives is an inherently hazardous business. Well, here goes.
During the 1980s, consultants' popular potions, bottled in Total Quality Management (TQM) and Human Resource Management (HRM), and later decanted into Business Process Re-engineering (BPR), promised to construct consensus in organizations. The power of such potions was distilled and diffused through the design of values and habits of thought—a «normative framework of work» (p. 522)[1]—that aspired to align individual and corporate "needs" and priorities. Such «corporate culturism», I wrote, «expects and requires employees to internalize the new values of "quality", "flexibility" and "value added"—to adopt and cherish them as their own» (p. 519).
For many managers the desirability of having employees identify with (or even better "internalize") the values of "quality", "flexibility" and "value added"' was, and probably remains, uncontentious. It is surely self-evident that these "new values" are also good values. After all, who is going to defend bad quality, inflexibility or negative value-added? It is precisely because it is difficult to question what is pursued in the name of the "new values" that critical thinking is invoked to scrutinise it.
Back in the 1980s management academics were not thinking critically about the "new" management philosophy being extolled in influential guru texts—notably, *In Search of Excellence* (Peters and Waterman, 1982) and subsequently revisited within "soft" variants of TQM, HRM and Organizational Learning (OL). These ideas were regarded as the latest, re-heated managerialist panacea that merited no serious consideration. Such ideas made no substantive contribution to our knowl-

edge of work or organizations as cultures, so they could safely be ignored as objects of scholarly examination. Even a decade after the publication of Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* (1982), there was little sign of interest in scrutinizing the idea of "strong culture" as advocated by such influential management gurus, and subsequently diffused into countless practitioner and student texts.

I too am disdainful of the twaddle contained in such books as *In Search of Excellence.* But I also marvelled at their popularity and apparent influence. As an aside, the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor of Aston University, where I worked during the 1980s, sent a copy to all heads of department. I daresay that most of these were binned, conspicuously positioned within their offices in the unlikely event of a visit, or perhaps they were inspected, like tea leaves, for signs of the mistrusted VC's intentions. Still, this gesture suggested the positive value being attributed to the "new" thinking and, of course, anticipated the spread of "new public management" ideas across the public sector. Given the ostensible success of corporate culturism in informing, if not capturing, the imagination of senior managers, I thought that it was important to reflect upon whether it had anything new to say. What might its popularity tell us about emergent philosophies of management control? How might its claims be critically reinterpreted? At the very least, I believed that corporate culturism warranted more than a dismissive groan of distaste.

I suspected that there was something (comparatively) "new" and seductive, but also disturbing, in corporate culturism that invited closer consideration. Yes, there were continuities with earlier, normative streams of management thought laid down in the writings of Barnard, Mayo and McGregor (see Barley and Kunda, 1992). But I sensed some mutation or shift; and I wanted to identify, explore, clarify and critique its novel features. I hoped also to communicate and illustrate my critique in a lively and memorable manner by making connections with central ideas—newspeak and doublethink—found in Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* I believed that this would make the analysis less dry as well as more accessible and memorable (see also Knights and Willmott, 1999).

The following reflections on *Strength* are organized as follows. I begin by distilling some of the central ideas and arguments of the article for readers who are unfamiliar with its contents. I then locate its thesis in the academic milieu of the 1980s, focusing upon my frustration with the purism of academic studies of culture and symbolism and connecting the positive reception of *Strength* to the development of critical management studies. Finally, I make a case for the continuing relevance of its central argument. Before offering some concluding comments on the connection of *Strength* to my current research interests.

TRIALS OF *STRENGTH*

Corporate culturism, I argued in *Strength,* «seeks to construct […] consensus by managing the culture through which employee values are

acquired. […] [C]orporate culturism [advocates] a systematic approach to creating and strengthening core organizational values in a way that excludes […] all other values. "Self-direction" is commended but, crucially, its scope and course is dictated and directed by the construction of employee commitment to core corporate values» (p. 524; see also Willmott, 1992).

In *Strength,* critical traditions of thought are invoked to make the argument that corporate culturism *aspires* to extend management control by colonizing the affective domain—the hearts as well as the minds of employees—in an innovative, oppressive and paradoxical manner—by claiming to expand their practical autonomy (p. 517). The implicit *intent* of corporate culturism, I argue, is to establish monocultures in which choices and decisions are made within a normative framework of core values that are established, or at least sanctioned, by management. At the same time, I sought to indicate why such intentions encounter resistances that frustrate their realisation.

Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* (hereafter, *Excellence)* distilled and promoted corporate culturism by commending the development of common, corporate-wide values. Omitted was consideration of how such values might be received and operationalized within specific settings or by particular work groups. *Excellence* assumed that the establishment of «a set of shared values and rules» (Peters and Waterman, 1982: 323) *by management* would be necessary *and sufficient* to ensure that employees would act autonomously but also compliantly and responsibly so as to maximise corporate performance. This, Peters and Waterman claimed, was the inner secret, or chief "lesson", of America's "best-run companies".

Why should employees be inclined to internalize a framework of values selected by management? Because, Peters and Waterman argued, they then benefit from the security of knowing what is expected of them while simultaneously enjoying the self-confirming space in which individual initiative can be exercised. The "strong culture" attributed to this preferred arrangement is, as I argued in *Strength,* conceived to «[enable] each employee to confirm a modern (humanist) sense of self, as a self-determining individual, without the burden of responsibility—the angst—that accompanies the making of (existential) choices between ultimate, conflicting values» (p. 527).

The individuality of each employee is ostensibly respected but this individuality is carefully constructed and circumscribed by management. To describe this contradiction, I borrowed Orwell's (1989) idea of "doublethink". Doublethink involves forgetting what it is necessary to forget (e.g., that individuality cannot be programmed) but then to draw it back into memory when it is needed for rationalizing purposes, and then to forget the entire process. My suggestion is that ideas of autonomy, individuality and/or self-determination are seized upon for the instrumental purpose of extending and deepening control over employees' hearts and minds. As I wrote in *Strength* the appeal of the «technocratic informalism» advocated by *Excellence* resides in the crypto-catholic anticipation that employees will «discipline themselves with

feelings of anxiety, shame and guilt that are aroused when they sense or judge themselves to impugn or fall short of the hallowed values of the corporation» (p. 523).

How, then, does this prescription differ from other, earlier ideas about how to enlist the cooperation of employees in work organizations? Other formulae for "humanizing" the workplace, including those developed by Mayo and McGregor assume an underlying consensus of values and interests between employers and employees. They emphasise how an underlying mutuality of interest is unintentionally unsettled by managers untutored in the basics of social science. The advocates of such ideas are confident, nonetheless, that cooperation will spontaneously arise once managers gain an adequate understanding of, and respond effectively to, employees' sentiments and need for self-actualization.

Corporate culturism also provides a prescription for employee cooperation and motivation that is claimed to remedy the shortcomings of earlier formulae. However, in contrast to this, its prescriptions do not rely upon a consensus of values spontaneously emerging when managers become attentive to the non-economic "needs" of employees and/or remove controls that restrict the scope for self-actualization. Instead *Excellence* assigns to management the task of *actively building* "strong cultures" where consensus and cooperation are engineered managerially, rather than emerge spontaneously. The building of "strong cultures" is prescribed as a precondition for enlarging employee discretion while minimising the risk that increased opportunities for self-actualization will be pursued at the employer's expense.

It is questionable whether many managers believed—outside the feverish atmosphere of Tom Peters' *Excellence* gigs at least—that the production of "strong culture" would be straightforward in its implementation, or even unequivocal in its benefits. Seasoned managers know only too well how difficult it can be to secure deep commitment, as contrasted to expedient, dramaturgical compliance from their subordinates. They may also anticipate how changing circumstances can render specific values less relevant for, or even disruptive of, their purposes. Nonetheless, the basic idea of corporate culturism struck a chord with many. For it seemed to place a powerful force—culture—in their service; and, of course, it chimed gratifyingly with the espoused mission of managers to raise corporate performance. What's more, for managers who may have qualms about engineering employees hearts and minds, there is the reassuring suggestion that corporate culturism expands individual autonomy as it improves corporate performance, and therefore that it is «morally neutral, if not morally beneficial» (p. 531). As Barley and Kunda (1992: 383) have observed, «Although shared beliefs and values might blur the boundaries between self and organization, such commitment was said to imply no loss of individualism or autonomy».

In *Strength,* I identified a number of reasons why attempts to manage culture were likely to fall short of their promise of corporate salvation. Most significantly, corporate culturism assumes that the core values of the organization will be given priority by employees, at least during the

hours of their employment. This claim is based upon the questionable view that employees' other values and associated priorities are weak and are therefore malleable. Yet employees bring diverse affiliations and identifications to the workplace, and also develop and incorporate these at work. From an employee standpoint, efforts to "strengthen culture" may therefore be experienced and resisted as unacceptably manipulative and intrusive upon their sense of identity and dignity. Where the introduction of corporate culturism does not provoke direct opposition moves to "strengthen culture" can produce cynical, calculative compliance rather than increased commitment. Of course, pragmatic managers may be more than happy to settle for a workable degree of cooperation; but the recognition of other allegiances points to an unresolved tension between the values ascribed by managers to organizations and the preferences of employees.

Even so, does it matter that the claims of corporate culturism were not wholly convincing for many managers? At least they could not be criticised for striving to wrap their staff in an authoritative mantle of culturism that promised to boost corporate performance. My objection to corporate culturism, however, is not that it struggles to attain what it sets out to achieve; but, rather, that it seeks to promote and achieve an outcome that is ethically dubious and, arguably, inconsistent with the practical autonomy that it aspires to engender. Crucially the idea that «practical autonomy [will] take place routinely» (Peters and Waterman, 1982: 323) within a normative framework of shared values favoured by management denies the employee's role in determining the framework within which s/he is enabled or permitted to exercise discretion. In effect, practical autonomy is equated with corporate conformity—an example of "newspeak" where the meaning autonomy is transformed and inverted as the conditions of autonomy are negated through their affirmation.

«In the newspeak of corporate culture, autonomy is represented as a gift that can be bestowed by [strong] culture upon employees rather than something that individuals *struggle* to realize [… It assumes that] autonomy can be realized within a *monoculture* that […] systematically suppresses ideas and practices that might problematize the authority of core corporate values […] Through the strengthening of culture, the space within organizations for expressing and developing awareness of, and allegiance to, alternative norms and values is reduced and, ideally, eliminated.» (pp. 527; 531; 532).

As a counterpoint to the corporate culturist to idea of practical autonomy, *Strength* presents Weber's conception of value-rational action where, instead of taking the established system of values as given, individuals explore diverse systems of values and make a deliberate choice, or series of choices, between and within them. Through value-rational action the «autonomy of the individual is forged as s/he plays and struggles with the question of which [value] standpoint s/he will consciously strive to enact» (p. 533). I connect the conditions of possibility of engaging in such struggles with the *democratic* (as contrasted to totalitarian) organization of institutions where, in principle, a diversity of value standpoints is celebrated and interrogated. Whether

they are interpersonal or institutional, democratic practices invite and encourage each participant to discover, communicate, and debate their preferred values. This understanding of the development and exercise of "practical autonomy" poses a direct alternative to initiatives intended to establish or preserve "strong cultures" in which there is a systematic screening out of values (and people) that are assessed to depart from, or that pose a challenge to, corporate authority: «you either buy into their norms or you get out» (Peters and Waterman, 1982: 77).

Having outlined some central themes of *Strength,* I now return to the question of what prompted its production.

TOWARDS CRITICAL MANAGEMENT STUDIES

Beginning in the mid 1970s, an abiding theme of my thinking has been the analysis of subjectivity and identity for the study of work and organization (e.g., Knights and Willmott, 1983, 1989, 1999, 2002) that is simultaneously attentive to their construction within relations of power. I remain interested in developing studies of management—empirical and conceptual—that are informed by critical traditions of thinking— Marx, Habermas, Foucault, Derrida, etc.—traditions that, in different ways, aspire to disclose how, for example, knowledge (e.g., of personal, social and corporate identity) is enabled and constrained by relations of power through which it is generated and legitimised.

One of the vehicles for this project was the Annual Labour Process Conference which David Knights and I jointly established and organized throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s[2]. Participants at the Labour Process Conferences had a distinctive "take" on cultures created by management, viewing them as ideological smokescreens for concealing fundamental conflicts of interest and/or as a supplement to the economic rationalism found in versions of Taylorism. In this intellectual context our attentiveness to subjectivity and culture, as contrasted with economics and structure, antagonised many orthodox labour process analysts who interpreted our work as a (neo-Human Relations) move to psychologize politico-economic relations. Their gripe has been that a focus upon subjectivity distracts attention from the production of oppressive relations through which capital exploits labour. Our response to this has been to argue that the reproduction of these structures does not occur independently of subjectivity, and it is therefore necessary to reconstruct labour process analysis in a way that more *adequately* addresses the presence and significance of subjectivity.

Looking across, as it were, from the Labour Process Conferences to the work of academics whose work focussed upon "organizational culture", I was irritated and bemused by the paucity of critical analyses of "corporate culturism". More specifically, I was dismayed by the lack of critical commentaries emanating from a conference dedicated to the study of organizational culture and symbolism (SCOS)—a venture that had been spun-off from the worthy but plodding European Group for

2. As organizers of the Labour Process Conferences, David Knights and I were interested in promoting and advancing the development of analyses that challenged mainstream thinking and established forms of management practice. At that time, Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974) had been published to critical acclaim, and labour process analysis offered a fresh and challenging alternative to the orthodoxy of functionalism and contingency theory. So the choice of conference title was somewhat opportunistic as, prior to its establishment, neither of us had a deep acquaintance with the literature— Andrew Friedman Tony Elger, Craig Littler, Anna Pollerst and Paul Thompson were amongst the leading non-US contributors to the emergent debate in which the nature of management control was a major area of investigation.

Organization Studies (EGOS), the principal forum for specialists in this field. I admired SCOS's deft cocking of a snook at the EGOS juggernaut. SCOS promoted bottom-up engagement and, despite difficulties and set-backs, developed a community of scholars with a distinctive, collaborative research ethos. But analysis of organizational culture presented at SCOS conferences rarely extended to the study of how managers were being urged to "strengthen" organizational cultures, as a means of management control, by requiring employees to share a common normative framework. Those undertaking research on organizational culture and symbolism were seemingly indifferent to the appearance of corporate culturism and/or airily dismissive of its claims. They seemed to regard the normative, instrumental conception of culture, which was the hallmark of this latest management philosophy, as beneath contempt, or at least beyond the reach of respectable academic analysis. At that time, at least, many participants in SCOS did not seem politically engaged or even politically self-aware. I do not mean that SCOS members lacked an engagement with established or alternative political parties or movements. Even less do I mean that the instigators of SCOS were naïve about the political nature of their break from EGOS. Rather, I mean that SCOS proceeded without recognition of the political relevance and effects of a stance that excluded critiques of corporate culturism. All too often, for my liking at least, participants in SCOS conferences addressed the culture and symbolism of organization primarily as an aesthetic, without giving sufficient attention to its political implications or significance[3]. I found the reluctance to engage critically with corporate culturism somewhat precious and exasperating. It smacked of academic elitism, myopia and positivism. Elitism and myopia because certain forms of knowledge were, seemingly, beyond the pale and unworthy of critical examination; crypto-positivism because the purists believed that *Excellence* texts could reveal nothing about the real culture of organizations. This stance seemed distinctly odd and occasionally self-indulgent to those of us, including participants in labour process conferences, who were inclined to regard corporate culturism as a distinctive and dangerous species of «political philosophy» (p. 541).

I thought it important to explore the limitations of, and resistance to, corporate culturism as well as to explicate its distinctive features and seductive appeal. The first outing for *Strength* was at the 5th SCOS Conference. The paper took the form of a polemic that, given its antagonistic content, was surprisingly well, or at least courteously, received. Perhaps I delivered it poorly or maybe the ideas were rather crudely or vaguely formulated. Whatever the reason, it did not arouse the anger, or stimulate the debate, that I had, perhaps naively, fantasised. I was simultaneously relieved and disappointed. It felt a bit like farting in a lift. The (rather small) audience studiously ignored the noxious message as they patiently awaited their release. Requests for copies were not overwhelming.

Undaunted, I submitted a somewhat "de-polemicised" and "academicised" version of the conference paper to the *Journal of Management Studies.* The comments from referees were attentive, penetrating,

3. The events, which incorporated "happenings" as well as more traditional papers, were exceptionally well presented and highly enjoyable. When avoiding mere experimentalism and/or pretentiousness they were culturally as well as intellectually challenging in a way that sought to engage the body as well as the mind.

tough. Their constructive criticisms, combined with comments that I had received from other colleagues, enabled me to transform the paper—for better or worse—from a polemical rant directed at purist organizational culture researchers into a somewhat less polemical, critical examination of the phenomenon of corporate culturism. When, after a series of revisions it was finally accepted, I recall feeling pleased with it, rather than simply relieved to see the back of it. I was pleased because I felt that *Strength* had something distinctive to say; the referees had really helped me develop and finesse the arguments; and despite complying with the conventions of academic journals, it seemed to retain something comparatively fresh and engaging. Uniquely, I invited my wife to read it when it appeared in print—an unprecedented request which I take to be indicative of an intuitive sense of having written some prose that conveys some passion for the power of critical thinking. I believe that the paper illustrates how such thinking can disrupt received wisdom, can illuminate widespread experiences of working in organizations and can reach beyond a narrow audience of fellow management specialists. It is somewhat ironic, then, that readers of *Strength* often seem to fasten upon my appreciation of the seductive appeal of corporate culturism without noticing or acknowledging my discussion of sources of resistance to it. Still, despite being pleased with it I never imagined that *Strength* would become something of a "One Hit Wonder". At that time, the critical turn taken by a growing number of management academics was not foreseen. It is this move to which the widespread use in teaching and frequent citation of *Strength* is, I surmise, principally attributable. Had it not engaged with a general area—"culture" and "control"—at a time when it was picked up by the growing wave of "critical management studies" (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992, 1996, 2003), it would, very likely, have sunk without trace.

CORPORATE CULTURISM—DEAD AND GONE?

There is a tendency, to which I have partially acceded, to associate corporate culturism with the excesses of the 1980s. Wasn't it simply a fad, a managerial fashion, that boomed and then busted? Hasn't it been overtaken by other crazes—for process re-engineering or knowledge management? Well, yes, it was very fashionable but I would say that it has not been discarded so much as assimilated into contemporary thinking about culture change programmes, organizational learning and teamworking, etc. The *thinking* of corporate culturism has been rolled into these more recent developments, rather than washed out of them. What I wrote about corporate culturism «[infusing] diverse change programmes» (p. 516) during the 1980s can be said of thinking that has been popularised in the 1990s. While expectations about the effectiveness of corporate culturism have no doubt been lowered and qualified, the basic philosophy of pseudo or managerial humanism continues to be invoked—perhaps for want of an *ideologically* acceptable alternative for the "best practice" of managing "human resources".

Let us admit that the idea that corporate culture can be completely managed is no longer (if it ever was) widely credible. The ignominious fate of many of the "strong culture" companies celebrated by Peters and Waterman is perhaps the most damning indictment of its limited or partial effectiveness. Managers have recognised, if they did not already know well enough, that employees are less amenable to internalising corporate values than might be wished in their more triumphalist or desperate moments. Or they have discovered that changing circumstances render previously privileged values dysfunctional or even counter-productive for current managerial and/or corporate objectives. Nonetheless, a strong residue of corporate culturist thinking lives on in the idea that the key to retaining and motivating staff resides in the development of work group, if not organizational, cultures which encourage (high performance) employees to identify strongly with values and priorities defined by management.

This is not the place to review the myriad of ways in which corporate culturist thinking has seeped into contemporary prescriptions for management. Increasingly, there is a requirement that employees, at all levels, are "team players"—which effectively means demonstrating a willingness to play the game according to managerially favoured values and norms. In its most extreme, doublethink form, this thinking commends and anticipates the very demise of management. Here I will consider one, comparatively articulate example of such thinking: Cloke and Goldsmith's *The End of Management and the Rise of Organizational Democracy* (2002). «Management», Cloke and Goldsmith (2002: 3-4) argue, is becoming redundant as «organizational democracy» (note the relevance here of Orwellian "newspeak") ostensibly supersedes its historical function; «Managers are the dinosaurs of our modern organizational ecology. The Age of Management is finally coming to a close… Autocracy, hierarchy, bureaucracy and management are gradually being replaced by democracy, heterarchy, collaboration and self-managing teams… This is not just wishful thinking but a reality in many organizations, where strategic associations of self-managing employee teams are collaborating as members of complex, matrixed, high-performance networks…».

The claim, repeated by a number of other advocates of management's demise (e.g., Koch and Godden, 1996; Purser and Cabana, 1998), is that organizations are evolving from an outmoded bureaucratic form—in which managers exist and operate as «overseers, surrogate parents, scolds, monitors, functionaries, disciplinarians» (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2002: 3)—to a more mature, less infantile form where «responsibility is a prerequisite for growing up» (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2002: 5). On this account, the existence of management as a top-down, coercive function is irrational and anachronistic as: *«All forms of managing* other people's work hinder their responsibility, creativity, flexibility, responsibility, effectiveness, and growth, even in small, subtle ways. They prevent employees from being deeply connected and passionate about their work and keep them in a state of childlike dependence» (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2002: 17, emphasis added).

What Cloke and Goldsmith characterise as "managing" and "management", I submit, very closely resembles what Peters and Waterman (1982) mean by, the rational model of management (Ch. 3) which, they argue, «causes us to denigrate the importance of values» (Peters and Waterman, 1982: 51, emphases omitted), and for which a very similar remedy is prescribed.

Cloke and Goldsmith (2002: 122) follow Peters and Waterman in stressing the centrality of values, arguing that «values, ethics, and integrity play a defining role in every aspect of organizational life». But, in addition, their advocacy of "organizational democracy" emphasises the importance of employees' *active participation and consent* in the choice of values. They retain Peters and Waterman's basic thesis that maximising the performance of employees can be most effectively accomplished through the development of an appropriate culture but Cloke and Goldsmith move beyond Peters and Waterman's top down specification of the normative framework by stressing that employee value commitment involves complex and paradoxical social processes; and that gaining commitment necessitates active employee involvement in the process of choosing values. Accordingly, Cloke and Goldsmith reject the (simplistic) view that values can be readily imposed or imprinted from above. «Any effort to manage values [recall here Cloke and Goldsmith's restrictive and pejorative conception of "manage" and "management"] will quickly become counterproductive», they argue (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2002: 117), as it will elicit the kinds of infantilism. *Contra* Peters and Waterman, winning hearts and minds is understood to involve more than identifying and institutionalising a set of values that managers believe will be attractive to employees, as well as effective in improving performance. Cloke and Goldsmith (2002: 125) advocate a more subtle, seemingly dialogical approach to the development of culture in which «consensus on shared values» is accomplished through a process of constructive debate: «We need to stop trying to manage values through coerced uniformity and instead *encourage employees to take responsibility for defining and implementing their own values in concert with others»* (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2002: 117, emphasis added).

Cloke and Goldsmith are responsive to the criticism that the imposition of a *managerially specified* organizational (mono)culture—the approach commended by Peters and Waterman—tends to impede the creativity, flexibility, etc. deemed essential for securing and maintaining innovation and competitiveness. For them, the nurturing of «diversity, autonomy, and a respect for individuality [is directly connected to] the idea that employees need to develop their own values» (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2002: 117). Yet, at the same time, we are told that «[Organizations] can bolster value-based relationships by recognising and encouraging the behaviours that uphold their values and discouraging and eliminating those that undermine them» (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2002: 125).

It is at this point in *The End of Management* that "management" returns with a vengeance, albeit by the backdoor, in the form of "organiza-

tion(s)". "Organizations" of course, can do nothing. Only their members are capable of acting to "discourage" or "eliminate" the behaviours that are assessed to undermine particular values. In effect, Cloke and Goldsmith's blueprint of "organizational democracy" does not advocate "the end of management" so much as the complete internalisation of managerial values by employees who, it is anticipated, will commit to these values when they are given the opportunity to make such a choice. Any further need for "management" is thereby eliminated. Why will employees choose to internalise managerial values? Because, Cloke and Goldsmith (2002: 5) claim, this commitment will release them from working in a vicious circle where they are infantilised by overbearing managers who keep them in a state of «psychological immaturity […] perpetuated by never learning to think or act for one-self, in concert with others».

From Cloke and Goldsmiths's standpoint, it is "management" as an outmoded idea, and associated set of practices, rather than issues of ownership or life-chances, that is conceived to stand in the way of a more enlightened form of organization in which «hierarchy and bureau-cracy, autocracy and injustice, inequality and privilege» (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2002: 38) are systematically dissolved and eventually removed. Movement towards this utopia is checked only by diehards who remain attached to obsolete thoughts and deeds that assume the necessity of managers imposing their agendas upon employees who resent and resist such tyranny, thereby perpetuating a viscous circle as managers are provoked into redoubling their efforts to micromanage recalcitrant employees. Cloke and Goldsmith (2002: 39) give a graph-ic account of the everyday problem, or struggle. «[Employees] view discipline and termination as arbitrary and harassing, engaging in gos-sip and spreading rumours, see managers as insensitive, secretive, and manipulative, and accuse them of using organizational power to achieve personal ends. They block information from flowing up the organization, allow managers to make mistakes, and blame other employees for failures. They make untenable demands for higher wages and better working conditions, make fun of managers behind their backs, and challenge their decisions[…] They avoid responsibili-ty, file technical grievances, form adversarial unions, bring lawsuits, and disregard or resist efforts to bring about change».

This syndrome, Cloke and Goldsmith (2002: 42) contend, has prompt-ed the search for new forms of work, facilitated by new technologies, where management is replaced by "organizational democracy", resulting in an «end of forcing people to work in ways they do not choose». For their readers, and certainly for any employer or execu-tive, Cloke and Goldsmith's vision of "organizational democracy" prompts the question: how and why are people going to choose in ways that are consistent with continuing their employment? In other words, in the absence of "management" that directs their activity either by close supervision or the imposition of a normative framework with which they instrumentally comply, why should employees choose to act in ways that coincide with the profitable application of their labour?

My answer to this question is that "organizational democracy", comprising new forms of organizing envisaged by Cloke and Goldsmith, can develop within capitalist firms only where employees are successfully enjoined to identify with a culture that is consonant with the privileging of capitalist values and practices. A condition of possibility of the end of management is the establishment of a "strong culture" *wedded to capitalist priorities* in which "values", "ethics" and "integrity" are defined in ways that are consistent with the legitimation and reproduction of these priorities. Increased "participation" and "involvement" may render employees' working lives somewhat more interesting and satisfying by attenuating elements of what Cloke and Goldsmith term "management". But it is disingenuous to use the terms "participation" and "involvement", let alone "democracy" to describe processes for facilitating employee consent to values and practices favoured by executives hired to do the bidding of employers.

Cloke and Goldsmith assume that value consensus and commitment will emerge through a process of open discussion. In contrast, I conceive of the process of value commitment within capitalist organizations as mediated by *relations of (inter)dependence that are endemic to the employment relationship.* On the one side of this relationship, managers acting on behalf of owners and employers generally prefer to "encourage" employees to embrace or, at least overtly comply with, values that they conceive to be consonant with corporate profitability and/or their own career advancement. This assessment may include a more or less rational calculation about how much resource to devote to such "encouragement", and how to make it attractive to its targets. On the other side, and except in cases where employees are openly antagonistic or fully compliant, the inclination of employees is either to suppress or mask the expression of oppositional values, or to seek employment elsewhere.

In very unusual circumstances—for example, where alternative employment is either abundant or very scarce—something superficially comparable to Cloke and Goldsmith's vision of a developing, uninhibited discussion of values may occur. In such cases, employers or employees are in a weak position to contest the values favoured by the other party. And so, by default, a kind of consensus can emerge, the maintenance of which is highly contingent upon fluctuations in the labour market. In the vast majority of cases, however, "consensus" is likely to be patchy and flimsy at best—resulting, inevitably, in interventions from management (or, sometimes, failing that, by employees or their representatives) to ensure compliance with certain values and, more importantly, the maintenance of productive activities. To say, as Cloke and Goldsmith suggest, that «*organizations* [will, for example,] encourage individual and team responsibility for implementing [values]» (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2002: 125, emphasis added), exemplifies Orwellian newspeak. For it is the owners or managers who routinely intervene to ensure such implementation, which, in the most extreme case, means closure or disposal.

FINAL REFLECTION:
STRUCTURE AND AUTONOMY

Since writing *Strength* I have become increasingly interested in, and influenced by, poststructuralist thinking advanced by Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Laclau and Mouffe, etc. The attraction of their ideas resides, I believe, in their assistance in clarifying and developing the putatively poststructuralist thinking that in my case, emerged out of early flirtations with existentialism and critiques of structuralist Marxism (Knights and Willmott, 1982, 1983, 1985). As an aside, I recall a referee's comment on a joint paper with David Knights submitted to *Sociology* in the late 1970s. The referee noted its strong Lacanian flavour—which came as something of a surprise as neither of us had read Lacan at that time, and indeed had barely heard of him. For me, poststructuralist thought is appealing because the totalising tendencies of structuralism are problematized without being abandoned (as it is with radical deconstructionism). There is a retention of the basic structuralist insight that the social is structured through multiple relations of subordination; but the structuring or, better, structurings, of the social are conceived to be open, or overdetermined.

So, for example, if we follow Laclau and Mouffe (1985), identity is formed within multiple structures of subordination, none of which is determinant of its content or, relatedly, of human actions. The employment relationship is one of these structures which interpolates the employee in a relationship of subordination to the employer. This relationship is not one of unqualified dependence, however. In capitalist work organizations, owners and their agents are themselves dependent upon the productive activity of employed labour to produce the goods and services from which, through a process of institutionalised exploitation, private wealth is accumulated and managerial overheads are paid. But because identities are overdetermined they cannot be read off from structure of subordination.

From Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) poststructuralist standpoint, the relationship between owners of capital and suppliers of labour is structurally unequal but not inherently antagonistic. This admits the possibility that labour will not contest the demands of capital and, indeed, may actively support its values and priorities without being subjected to the charge of "false-consciousness". As I acknowledged earlier, there are unusual circumstances in which other interpolations are absent or are effectively suspended so that something resembling Cloke and Goldsmith's organizational democracy may appear. To repeat, such cooperation is not registered as "false consciousness" since no essential identity is attributed to "labour". The identity of those who supply labour—that is, those who are obliged to sell their productive capacity within capitalist firms in return for a wage—remains open and contingent. There are other determinations of their identity—gender, communal, religious, etc. arising from other structures of subordination—that compete for their identification, and which may be privileged over those of the employment relationship. So, for example, the (hegemonic) struggles to establish and retain a religious, gendered or

communal identity may be differentiated from, and prioritised over, any struggle to resist exploitation, in the form of work intensification, or any campaign to improve terms and conditions.

Given this de-centring of the employment relationship in the formation of social identity and, by implication, the transformation of social relations (as envisaged by Marx), post-Marxist poststructuralism associates radical change with the *political process* of articulating demands in a particular way (e.g., as "workers" and by forging alliances between groups whose dominant identifications are formed within alternative relations of subordination). Through such political practices, interests are recurrently constructed and partially pursued, rather than affirmed and realised as a predetermined, essential destiny. Instead of pursuing competing and often mutually obstructive objectives, the challenge of "radical democracy" is to work, or struggle, in precarious alliances to change structures of subordination in ways that create greater space and scope for the development of a plurality of identifications. It is of course, precisely the elimination of such plurality that advocates of corporate culturism and the *End of Management* seek in the name of extending the "practical autonomy" of involved, "self managing" employees. And it is for this reason that such thinking is a prime target for critical management studies.

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