PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND THE EMERGENCE OF MANAGEMENT*

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the debate concerning the study of management. Arguing that definitions of management have suffered from conceptual obscurity, it advocates that an understanding of management must address relational, constitutive and political dimensions of its operation. The work of Michel Foucault, particularly the concept of power/knowledge and his ascending analysis of power, offers such an approach. The relevance of Foucault for recasting the study of management is illustrated through an analysis of performance appraisal systems introduced into UK universities.

INTRODUCTION

A number of articles have questioned approaches taken to the study of management (Carroll and Gillen, 1987; Reed, 1984; Stewart, 1989; Whitley, 1984, 1989; Willmott, 1984, 1987). They echo Reed’s (1984, p. 279) argument that there is a need for ‘a substantial reconsideration of the conceptual equipment through which management on a theoretical, methodological and empirical level is to be understood’. Studies of management are criticized for treating it as a technical, politically neutral activity, decontextualized and depoliticized (Willmott, 1987). Stewart (1989) notes that management is all too often depicted as a static entity, a universally similar activity, prone to the development of lists. Such criticisms contain the kernel of remedial activity: for example, that the study of management should consider the political dimensions of its activity and emphasize the dynamic nature of its subject. However, this is to engage the studies in their own terms and, as such, it is questionable if this constitutes a fundamental rethink of the nature of management and its study.

A more serious criticism is that the study of management has suffered from reification, the action of taking conventional categories and treating them as if they were natural entities. By beginning an analysis with ‘management’ functions within an organization, management is already presaged in the analysis. Ontologically privileged, it exists as a theoretical antecedent, a
structured, pre-given aspect of organizations. This gives rise to definitions, as for example, that of Penrose (1980) used by Whitley (1989, p. 211), of management as ‘the construction, maintenance and improvement of an administrative system which co-ordinated and transformed human and material resources into productive services’. Such definitions conceal an element of tautology. As Willmott (1984, p. 354) notes, ‘integral to this image of the manager is the implication that in the absence of direction and control, little or nothing would be produced, the potential of subordinates would be unfulfilled and the lack of objective information on current progress would exclude the possibility of reviewing their activities’. Management is defined in terms of itself – the functional prerequisite of that which it is hoped to study. Activities are defined in terms of their origin, labelled managerial because they emanate from management, either deriving from the person designated as such, or from an imputed function.

To advance the substantial reconsideration which Reed (1984) recommends, it is necessary to deconstruct management and, in doing so, substantiate or justify the designation of particular roles or functions as being managerial. Definitions of management, unfortunately, suffer from conceptual obscurity. Stewart (1984, p. 323) maintains that the nature of management is ‘elusive’, whilst Astley (1984, p. 267) holds that there is a ‘clear lack of awareness over what constitutes the field’s (management science) core of knowledge’. Rarely is management precisely defined. Managerial work, managerial jobs and managerial behaviour are used interchangeably (Stewart, 1989). Hales (1986, p. 110) notes a failure to identify what is distinctive about managerial work, with the literature confining itself to ‘what it is like, not what it is’. Given the lack of explicit definitions, management has to be imputed or deduced from studies of it. Based on the assumption that managerial work is done by those in managerial jobs, there has been the attempt to decipher what management ‘is’ from what managers ‘do’ (Stewart, 1984). The value of such approaches is necessarily limited, as Whitley (1984, p. 210) comments: ‘most studies fail to justify their selection of individuals being studied as “managers” which rather vitiates any claims to draw general conclusions about the distinguishing features of “managerial” work’.

The demand for conceptual clarity is not motivated by a desire for more eloquent definitions. Conceptual clarity is important because it forces the recognition that ‘management’ has the status of a conceptual object, an abstraction. The concepts ‘manager’ and ‘management’, as Rosen (1984) reminds us, are ‘social artifacts reflecting social relations’. Management is a ‘given’ within a conceptual framework; it has a summarizing function within an abstracted systematic statement. Management, however, has become such a norm of institutionalized knowledge that its status as a conceptual object, an abstraction, has become obscured. In recognizing management as a concept, it behoves us to examine it as a theoretical construct rather than assume its existence as a natural entity.

As Machin and Lowe (1983) note, management is something of an omnipresent process, with most individuals in an organization at some point carrying out ‘managerial’ activities. However a distinction drawn by Willmott (1984, p. 350) is useful in dissociating the omniscient from the particu-
laristic in the uses of the term. Recognizing that it is possible to be engaged in management without being a manager, he draws the distinction between ‘management’ as reflexive social action, intrinsic to human agency and management as being ‘institutionally empowered to determine and/or regulate certain aspects of the actions of others’. It is this latter definition which will inform our consideration of management here.

As a definition it has three important implications. It emphasizes the social context of management – management operates through people, rather than being a disembodied practice. This identifies management as a relational activity – management manages in relation to something or someone. Its identity is derived from its relation to the ‘other’. It is not an absolute and self-contained entity, intrinsic to a person or action. Although managerial work has been recognized as ‘collective and interdependent’ (Whitley, 1989) involving a reliance on other people (Stewart, 1984), this is understood as the interdependence or interplay of discrete actors (Roberts, 1984). Management as a relational concept, however, involves the interdependence of meaning and activity. It is the rejection of an essentialist view of management and managerial practices. It also emphasizes the practice of management, its active construction as an activity or process.

The relational and the constitutive dimensions suggest a research strategy which decentres management. Defining management in these terms indicates that it is the relationship between elements which can aid an understanding of social phenomena, more so than an examination of properties in isolation may do (Whitley, 1984). Rather than start with management as a pre-given entity, the central organizing focus through which it is to be understood, management should be denied its privileged status. Before outlining what such an approach would involve, the third dimension of management must be addressed.

Willmott’s definition stresses the political dimension of management: the essence of managing is power. Within what may be termed orthodox approaches to management power remains implicit. Management is synonymous with organizational functioning, a necessary set of tasks and roles for the efficient achievement of organizational objectives. It is a systematic characteristic of organizations functioning in a model of means–end rationality (Lowe and Puxty, 1989; Richbell, 1983). Power is usually addressed as an analogue of authority, considered in analyses of leadership styles, decision-making, influence and networks, informing studies as to ‘who has power?’ or ‘power to do what?’. Radical critiques of this approach are directed at its failure to confront adequately the issue of power, and its neglect of political economy and broader capitalist relations of production (Chua et al., 1989; Knights and Willmott, 1986; Machin and Lowe, 1983). They criticize the failure of the orthodox approach to acknowledge that portraying management as the selection and achievement of goals and the direction and co-ordination of organizational activity necessarily entails the operation of power and control (Otley, 1983). For the radical critique, the concept of control is central to an understanding of management.

Both radical and orthodox perspectives, however, operate with an economic model of power. Not only is power deduced from, and in the service of,
the economy; more importantly, the metaphor for understanding its operation is that of the commodity. Power is something externally 'held' or possessed, embodied in a person, an institution or a structure, to be used for individual, organizational or class purposes. As a commodity it is portrayed in zero-sum or negative terms, commonly presented as 'power over': the traditional representation of A's getting B to do something they would, or should, not otherwise do. Although the dimensions of power have been critiqued (Lukes, 1974), initiating debates as to its nature and whether it resides in its potential or its exercise (Benton, 1981; Hindness, 1982, Isaac, 1982), the underlying concept in both orthodox and radical approaches to management remains that of power as a commodity or possession.

This conception prompts the questions, 'who holds power?' or 'where does it reside?' It assumes a central organizing focus or source, the study of which involves examining how it percolates from organizational apex to base, informing a descending analysis of power. It involves a search for determinants, sought in the conscious intention or decision of voluntaristic subjects, or determining or constraining institutional sources of power. Explanations are thus caught in a dualism between agency and structure, a dualism which has been identified as being at the heart of the recent impasse in theorizing about management (Knights and Willmott, 1985; Reed, 1984; Willmott, 1987).

The work of Foucault provides an alternative conceptualization of power. It also addresses the relational and the constitutive dimensions identified earlier as being important in an understanding of management. Foucault is critical of the economic model of power – power is not to be sought in a central point, something to be acquired or seized, 'a system of domination exerted by one group over another' (Foucault, 1981, p. 92). Rather, Foucault conceives of power as a property of relations. It is referred to as a relay or an interdependency. It is exercised rather than held, conceived of as a strategy, not as a property or possession. He writes 'power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered but rather exercised and only exists in action' (Gordon, 1980, p. 114). Foucault stresses the analytics of power relations, the specific mechanisms and technologies through which power circulates. Power is embedded in practice, and does not have a necessary centre. This relational concept of power is also, for Foucault, positive and creative.

This constitutive nature of power finds particular expression in the intimate connection between power and knowledge (Foucault, 1977, 1981; Gordon, 1980). Through the construct power/knowledge, Foucault draws attention to the fundamental role knowledge plays in rendering aspects of existence 'thinkable' and, as a result, able to be acted upon. Bodies of knowledge have direct implications for the way in which the conduct of individuals or groups may be directed. The process of making something known or visible, in other words, also makes it potentially governable. To 'know' something is to create a new power relation. In explaining the process of rendering a domain calculable and amenable to intervention, Foucault provides a valuable entree to the study of management.

The constitutive interdependence of power and knowledge has several implications. Knowledge is not detached and independent, a source of
illumination. It is implicated in, and integral to, the system of administration and governance which becomes established. This is in direct contrast to orthodox considerations of management which separate the planning or directive roles ('management') from an essentially secondary information control function ('administration'). The latter is an aid to management designed to enhance rational decision-making, or even viewed as 'routine' (Whitley, 1989). From a Foucauldian perspective, information systems are an integral and active component of an organization’s system of management. They are directly implicated in the forms of organizational segmentation, hierarchy and control which emerge. Concepts of manager and management are actively constructed in particular ways and are inseparable from the practical means of administration which are implicated in their emergence and functioning.

This deconstruction of management redirects analysis. The focus becomes the regulatory mechanisms which make a domain or arena open to regulation. This approach highlights systems by which power is exercised through its intersection with knowledge, for example, methods of observation, techniques of registration – mechanisms for the supervision and administration of individuals and groups. ‘The apparently humble and mundane mechanisms which appear to make it possible to govern . . . the indirect means of action and intervention’ (Miller and Rose, 1990, p. 8). The focus becomes, in Miller and Rose’s (1990) term, ‘governmentality’ – the processes of inventing, promoting and installing mechanisms of rule. Such an approach places a particular premium on language – the vocabularies of programmes through which power operates and the legitimacy of government is established.

Since concepts of power inform concepts of management, reconceptualizing power has implications for the way management is studied. Power as a relational activity stresses the practice of management – not ‘what managers do’, or ‘who manages’, but the ‘how’ of management. Following recommendations of organization theory (Morgan, 1980) that it is more beneficial to privilege organizing rather than organization, the focus becomes the activity of managing rather than management as an extant object. As Dreyfus and Rabinow (1986, p. 185) indicate ‘if power is not a thing or the control of a set of institutions . . . then the task for the analyst is to identify how it operates . . . to isolate, identify and analyse the web of unequal relationships set up’. The aim is to identify how non-egalitarian, asymmetrical relationships become established and perpetuated and sedimented within organizations. In other words the position argued here is not that management gives rise to ways of managing or managerial practices, rather practices or methods of regulation give rise to management.

The questions arising from a Foucauldian approach to management are: if power is exercised what sort of exercise does it involve? In what does it consist? What is its mechanism? The method of tracing knowledge production and its power effects advances based upon a number of principles: a study of techniques rather than institutions; practices rather than intentions; webs of power rather than classes or groups; knowledge rather than ideology; and perhaps most importantly, an ascending analysis of power (Silverman, 1985). The latter involves the study of power ‘at its extremities, in its ultimate
destinations' (Gordon, 1980). Starting from its 'infinitesimal mechanisms', its aim is to delineate how these have been 'transformed, displaced, extended ... by ever more general mechanisms' (Gordon, 1980, p. 114). It studies the way power is exercised, concretely and in detail - a relatively neglected area in studies of management.

This approach reinforces the recommendations which have been put forward for the empirical study of management: that such an approach be sensitive to the 'empirical diversity and social ambiguity' of managerial practices; analyse the mechanisms by which it becomes 'structured to take on a coherent and reasonably stable institutional state' (Reed 1984, p. 279); and that it remains closely linked to the organizational context rather than abstracting managerial activities from the institutional arrangements in which they are carried out (Whitley, 1989; Willmott, 1987).

**Method**

It is useful to apply this method to an empirical case to explore how a Foucauldian approach is capable of providing an additional dimension to the study of management. The example used here is an analysis of performance appraisal systems recently introduced into UK universities (Townley, 1990). Not traditionally associated with sites of management (Berry, 1983; Gherardi and Strati, 1990), the choice of universities allows for a broadening of the understanding of management in a context where this may not be readily discernable. It also provides the opportunity to view how what has been termed a relatively unrationalized social domain (Meyer, 1983) is brought under the jurisdiction of a rational organizational structure.

Appraisal is usually identified as a managerial activity: the provision of data designed to ensure that resources are used efficiently in accomplishing organizational objectives. Associated with organizational reform and improvement, appraisal is recommended to enhance managerial and organizational performance and employee motivation (Randell, 1989). In providing information on individual job performance it contributes to decision-making and resource allocation. Some accounts have questioned this view of appraisal for conveniently ignoring the political realities of the firm (Pym, 1973; Barlow, 1989), suggesting that appraisal functions as a mechanism for the control of employees. Indeed appraisals may differ, reflecting, as Pym (1973) indicates, the culture of the organization in which they operate, their functions mirrored in the particular details of a scheme: the choice of appraiser; links with promotion or discipline; appeal mechanisms; confidentiality of documents, *etc.* Both interpretations, however, reflect an approach to the study of management highlighted earlier - activities are defined in terms of their origin and imputed from an assumed intention or function; appraisal is a managerial activity to be judged in terms of its contribution to organizational effectiveness or managerial control.

The approach adopted here is to decentre 'management' as an organizing focus, dissociating power from structure or function. Rather, through an analysis of appraisal documentation as 'texts', Foucault's ascending analysis of power will be used to illustrate how management as a directional activity becomes articulated through minute organizational procedures. Limiting the
approach to written texts may draw the criticism that management in operation is neglected. Texts, however, are important. They provide guides for action and present information which prompts the need for decisions and solutions. As Miller and Rose (1990, p. 6) note, 'it is out of linguistic elements that rationalities of government are elaborated and seek to specify appropriate bases for the organization and mobilisation of social life'. Following, therefore, is a textual examination of appraisal systems based on appraisal documents, including forms and notes of guidance for appraiser and appraisee, which were collected from 30 universities. Proceeding from a detailed examination of the language of appraisal, how information is obtained and what is done with it thereafter, it illustrates how power relations are engendered. It is an exercise in the analysis of what Gowler and Legge (1983, p. 198) refer to as the rhetoric of bureaucratic control: 'highly expressive language that constructs and legitimizes managerial prerogatives in terms of a rational, goal directed image of organizational effectiveness'.

THE APPRAISAL PROCESS

Appraisals vary in the extent to which they articulate a role for the appraiser, and the extent to which an explicitly managerial role becomes written into existence. The premiss of appraisal is that the appraiser is 'present', the embodied persona essential to 'validate' the information which emerges during the appraisal process. The role which is articulated for this person varies greatly and is to some extent dependent on the process by which individuals are obliged to provide information about themselves and their jobs. For example, variation can be seen in terms of the structuring of the appraisal interaction: thus, 'the appraiser submits points for discussion arising from the appraisee's self appraisal'; 'the appraiser's role is to make the appraisee aware of the structure of the review meeting'; 'the appraiser should begin by giving a member of staff his/her observations on the appraisee's performance'. In each, the role of appraiser becomes structured in terms of initiating and controlling discussion especially through setting the agenda. This may be contrasted with:

the paper work involved requires the member of staff to give a good deal of thought to the job and its priorities and how they spend their time, it is only later in the process that the [appraiser] enters the situation in an active way. Both [appraiser] and employee become involved in actively seeking the right basis for constructive action as a joint professional task.

An explicitly managerial role is found in the articulation of the appraiser's role once the appraisal discussion has been conducted: 'the appraiser records comments on the appraisee's activity and development, including an assessment of performance'. Others are more directive as, for example, where the appraiser is required to 'make notes on job performance, the capability and potential of employees, including strengths of work, areas needing improvement and suggestions for further development'. This is to be contrasted with
schemes which do not require the appraiser’s comments, with the latter’s role limited to responding, as required, to the appraisee’s self assessment during the appraisal discussion.

The significance of written documentation is important. Again the role here varies. Some schemes explicitly require the appraiser’s comments to be an agreed record of the appraisal discussion and an agreed statement of objectives. Others are less specific on this – ‘the appraiser makes written and hopefully agreed summary comments reviewing overall performance’. The more managerial stipulate that:

following the meeting the appraiser will complete the appraisal record and forward it to the member of staff stating a summary of objectives and activities in the last year, comments on achievements, problems and constraints, a summary of objectives for the following year, comments on expected standards, methods of achievement, timescales and specific action points including training and development.

The tasks of appraiser as monitor may be firmly established thus: ‘the aim is to judge (and record) the quality of performance and to identify ways to improve it which can be checked at a subsequent appraisal’. In some cases the appraiser’s role becomes an explicitly judgemental one:

some members of staff will chiefly need to be told that their work is excellent and that it is appreciated. Some will need to be encouraged to identify and then pursue new activities or areas of work of interest to them. Others may need to be encouraged to a greater effort . . . a few may need to be told that parts of their work are not up to the necessary standard.

The appraisal procedures vary in the extent to which they specifically articulate the nature of the appraiser’s authority and the extent of a judgemental role. Most systems deny the element of judgement, depersonalizing the process by appealing to notions of a seemingly externally verifiable objectivity. Thus: ‘the comments by the head of department will be of a judgemental nature, it is vital that comments are as objective and fair as possible’; or ‘appraisal is to contribute to common aims. That purpose would be frustrated by an inept exercise of procedure in which it appeared that a head was exercising self-indulgent authority. Authority will have to be exercised and sometimes severely but it must be exercised clearly in the common good.’ This is in contrast to ‘the term appraisal usually implies a judgement by a superior of a subordinate, that is a process which is unilateral and top down. A shift to “staff review” recognises that this approach will be unacceptable within a university environment.’ Making judgements ‘on a colleague’s personal worth’ is under this perspective explicitly rejected.

One area at issue is control over the labour process and the degree of individual control over work. Appraisal has important implications for this, varying in the extent to which control over work is seen as being something to be discussed in consultation with colleagues or directed by the emergent hierarchy. Thus, for example, a more collegially based system states ‘one
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The objective is to help the employee set personal goals at an acceptable and realistic level and discuss the means by which they can be realised. For others, ‘management’ emerges by becoming inextricably linked to control over the labour process: ‘appraisal provides the opportunity for individuals to discuss what performance is expected of him/her and receive feedback’. Appraisal, structured within a formally hierarchical relationship, assumes the directly experienced elements of managerial control found in the judgement of work and deriving from this the ‘legitimacy’ to influence its subsequent direction. ‘Targets’ become externally established as, ‘the head of department should use his/her expectations of what is required of a member of staff as criteria for measurement and in the interview should invite staff members’ comments on criteria chosen’. Targets may become centrally established as, for example, the notes for guidance for appraisers in one appraisal system which makes reference to three to four research papers being set as an example of a target set per year. Sometimes there are constraints on the ability of appraisers to impose targets by ensuring explicit reference on the appraisal form to problems or difficulties in achieving them.

In other circumstances control over the labour process, although not directly or explicitly articulated as a ‘managerial’ activity may be circumscribed by the format in which work is discussed, for example, ‘it is important that target setting be relevant to goals which are valued and focus on the specific and the measurable, the realistic and the attainable, they should be actions which it will be possible to review in a years time’. Sometimes this is quite specific:

Please find ways of stating objectives which make them: quantifiable (wherever possible make them objective and thus measurable), capable of being tested (define the constraints within which they are to be achieved, within a definite timescale), precise (clear, well defined and written in as few words as possible).

Work then becomes articulated in terms of target setting – thus ‘statements made at previous appraisals will be considered in order to review how far agreed goals and targets have been achieved’. What emerges is another component of the rhetoric of bureaucratic control identified by Gowler and Legge (1983, p. 198) as that of a ‘rational, goal directed image of organizational effectiveness’. What is being privileged is the ‘quantitative, results-orientated, explicitly rational . . . and independently verifiable’ (Earl, 1983, p. 115). Credence is given to what Morgan (1988, p. 480) calls the overarching metaphor of the numerical view of reality. Some appraisals explicitly reject this, however, ‘the difficulties of trying to quantify output in any useful way and of trying to judge progress within specialized areas would present almost insuperable problems’.

Analysis of the emergence of management cannot, however, rely solely on an analysis of process. Content is also important. This can be seen in particular in the appraisals of heads of departments, where the appraisal of the managerial role is predominant. Many appraisals reflect the view that ‘the outcome of appraisal carries as much purport for appraisers and review-
ers about the quality of leadership and management as it does for employees about individual performance'. Although appraised in performance as academics, administrative and 'managerial qualities' are also scrutinized. In one university the hierarchical appraisal of the Head or Chair Role is on whether there is 'efficient and effective use of departmental resources; the extent to which they [heads] maximize the opportunities and performance of staff of the department, ensuring optimal quality in teaching, research and consultancy'. In some cases this is supplemented by assessment against departmental and faculty indicators. What emerges is the definition of the head in an explicitly managerial way in terms of directing the actions of others, with the subsequent appraisal of him or her in this capacity subsequently reinforcing this.

Throughout is the implicit assumption of 'objective' information external to appraiser and appraisee, accessible through the appraisal process, the truth of which is more likely to be discerned by the appraiser. This 'externalization' of knowledge as existing 'out there' becomes inextricably linked to control and is particularly observable in issues which relate to the source of the information to be used in appraisal. In some appraisals information is restricted to that provided by the appraisee, in others however the source of information can be quite wide ranging, including 'information known directly to the appraiser, and information solicited by the appraiser from other relevant members of the department' or 'other staff both within and outside the department'. Or, as in one case, 'in order to appraise the chair . . . and conduct a broader appraisal of managerial effectiveness the Vice Chancellor (VC) should be able to take informal soundings from professors and other senior staff within departments on a confidential basis as is required'. In this case the VC is also able to take informal soundings outside the university in relation to research performance.

Student evaluations are obviously an important source of information and again are variously handled indicating differing concepts of individual autonomy and the managerial role. In some cases evaluation lies within the discretion of the appraisee: 'the curriculum vitae should make reference to the methods of obtaining feedback and attempts at improvement'. In others the methods to be used are stipulated. For example, 'teaching is to include a questionnaire which is subject to approval by the staffing committee'. Again the role of the appraiser varies: 'questionnaires may not be issued to students without prior discussion between the appraiser and appraisee, completed questionnaires being part of the appraisal process and will be confidential to the appraiser and appraisee'. Alternatively the review of teaching is seen as a departmental or university responsibility, the results of which are then to be communicated to the appraisee — 'student opinion about the quality of the lectures will be sought and made known to the lecturer'.

This examination of the 'extremities of power', the techniques of notation, in the textual variation amongst appraisal documents illustrates how nonegalitarian, asymmetrical relationships may become structured and established in a variety of different areas and have implications for control over work, individual autonomy and the way relationships with others are handled. Continuing this ascending analysis of power it is important to trace further power effects of knowledge systems.
Access to and control of information is crucial to an appraisal scheme. However, this introduces one of the inherent paradoxes of appraisal – that the information required to ensure effective work organization will not be forthcoming if it is thought this will jeopardize the individual. If this indicates restricted access to documents at the local level there are other, counter pressures, which promote the need for a wider circulation. Once the initial decision has been taken to introduce appraisals, others follow as, for example, if and how it is to be monitored. Incremental decision-making reinforces these dynamics. As one observer commented: ‘heads of department and deans argued that if access [to appraisal documents] was restricted, why was the university spending money on appraisal, the university wants to get a return from appraisal’. Not only does the knowledge created in appraisal require the legitimation of the appraiser, in many cases the documented process which results must be verified by a higher level. Appraisal records must be viewed to ensure a ‘consistency of review’. The ‘need’ to monitor appraisal prompts additional documentation in terms of the procedures used to ensure appraisal has been completed, and examine how they have been conducted. This then leads to questions as to how detailed the monitoring process is required to be and the degree of visibility of lower organizational levels to higher tiers.

Access to documentation prompts its own intervention. Rarely is information viewed ‘for its own sake’; it has to be viewed ‘with a purpose’. Monitoring is not just the recording of processes, but provides the basis of intervention and with it, the creation of a managerial role. In conventional discussions of appraisal the assumption is made that documentation merely records summaries, agreed or otherwise, and that this encapsulates an independent and separate reality. On the contrary, summaries constitute independent texts. Removed from the context from which they were drawn, written comments lose an important facet of their meaning and, given the inherent creativity of language, become open to differing interpretations as they are reviewed by those further up the hierarchy. Information from a particular form allows information to be re-presented in an arena where decisions are to be made. The meaning summaries acquire as a subset of the context in which they are written is lost as new interpretations are imposed on them. Intervention may therefore be prompted in individual cases as differing interpretations are placed on ‘the case’ from those more immediate to its recording.

In addition to manufacturing a distinct managerial role, appraisal also has implications for structures within the organization. As Hacking (1986, p. 27) notes ‘a new body of knowledge brings into being a new class of people or institutions that can exercise a new kind of power’. Thus as one appraisal committee minutes noted: ‘complete consistency will never be achieved but steps must be taken to ensure that basic principles are understood. Some new machinery will need to be created’ (emphasis added). New committees are thus established to oversee the procedure and the emergence of another managerial layer derives almost axiomatically from the appraisal process. Once a committee is established, the need for it to be seen to do something in order to justify its existence may serve to further centralize decision-making in the organization. Given the ‘garbage can’ model of decision-making (Cohen et
al., 1972), this process may develop along very ad hoc lines, but develop nonetheless.

One form of intervention is that which can occur under the rubric of an 'aid to participants'. In one appraisal committee which was observed in which a number of completed appraisal documents were sent for review following a pilot scheme, it was suggested, half in jest at the time, that one of the appraisal records might be circulated to subsequent appraisees as an example of the style of report which the appraisal committee wished to see. The particular record in question happened to be of an academic who had had a particularly successful publication record that year, having just had a number of books and articles published. The jocular tone of the suggestion that the form might provide an example was accompanied by a number of comic responses about 'production rates', and 'giving the troops some idea of what was required'. The tone of the meeting then turned more serious, concluding that the suggestion 'wasn't a bad idea'; a 'model' should be found; appraisees would appreciate it; and appraisers would have a clearer idea of what to look for. Thus a specific style of appraisal becomes favoured and a 'norm' becomes established against which to judge other appraisees and appraisers.

The appraisal procedure epitomises a process whereby procedures of notation are then removed to centres where calculations or judgements are made. What emerges, however, is how a functioning network arises from a loose assemblage of activities, not as something centrally planned or directed. The essence is adhocracy as problems and solutions evolve into structures and coping mechanisms, rather than a ubiquitous and omniscient management establishing structures to set objectives.

THE INFORMATION PANOPTICON

In many respects appraisal functions as the paper equivalent of the panopticon – an 'information panopticon' (Zuboff, 1988). Originally designed to inform prison construction, the panopticon is an architectural model. It involves the construction of a central observation tower around which are housed the 'inmates' of the prison and from which they are open to observation. The central tower was to house 'the administrative functions of management, the policing functions of surveillance, the economic functions of controlling and checking, the religious functions of encouraging obedience and work; from here all orders would come, all activities would be recorded, all offences perceived and judged' (Foucault, 1977, p. 174). In combining hierarchy, unilateral observation and a normalizing judgement, the panopticon has been defined as the principle of disciplinary organization. It offers this possibility through combining knowledge production and power effects.

Appraisal operates as a form of panopticon with its anonymous and continuous surveillance as seen in the articulation of a monitoring role. For example, 'academic deans may not need to see all appraisal forms below head of department. They will ask to see a sample range of completed forms so that they can monitor how the scheme is being operated in practice'. Often
monitoring and hierarchical access to records is introduced under the guise of fairness, for example, 'it is important for the integrity of the system that employees receive equality of treatment'; 'the pro-VC responsible for staffing matters will examine a random sample of proforma from time to time for the purpose of monitoring the scheme and ensuring common standards of judgement are being applied across the university and follow up action is being pursued'. Monitoring functions conflict with the confidentiality of the scheme, a dilemma which may not always be recognized, however, for example:

the university officers are to monitor the scheme and have the same access to appraisal documentation as other personal data concerning members of staff while at the same time creating an atmosphere of trust between appraiser and appraisee.

As a system of surveillance, appraisal, although discontinuous in action, is rendered permanent in its effects. Its functioning principle is that the individual never knows whether he or she is under surveillance or not. It represents the exercise of control at a distance both spatially and temporally, 'allowing the absence of face to face contact without the absence of control' (Robson and Cooper, 1989, p. 103). This effect is magnified in those systems where the source of information to be used in appraisal, and the access to final documentation, is unrestricted. Although operating through visibility, as a technology of power its effects remain largely invisible. It is the exercise of control, a method by which the powerful are helped to observe the less powerful but rarely, it must be noted, *vice versa*.

It is a feature of appraisal which is recognized by those who have to operate it. As one head of department commented:

it would spoil relationships if there was a formal review. If things are formalised they spoil relationships. It would introduce the feeling that every relationship has to be watched. That you have to creep about. It would introduce a bogus element into the relationship which you don't have now.... We operate as a team. This would be destroyed with the idea of spies around.

The panopticon effect is not just on those at the base of the hierarchy, but functions through a network of relations from base to top. Not only does monitoring serve to keep an independent check on what is happening, it also functions as an appraisal of appraisers: 'supervisors perpetually supervised' (Foucault, 1977, p. 177). As one system reports: 'The head will keep all documents in the attempt to ensure a uniformity of approach within departments and units, the staff development officer will be in touch with the head of department regularly to ensure as much uniformity as is possible throughout the university'. For others access to documents as a form of monitoring is explicit as a means of enabling 'the VC to review the professors to see how they manage their staff'. It has the function of reporting up the internal hierarchy. As indicated, its operation over time may serve to reinforce organizational hierarchy and centralization, as objectives are channelled...
down the organization and their subsequent implementation is monitored. As one consultant explained of one appraisal: ‘the VC saw the initial benefit in terms of information seeking, the task-setting element would be tightened up in the years ahead’. It also ensures that the ‘centre’ may strengthen its control over the organization: ‘Failure to conduct appraisals should be rapidly pursued by personnel . . . a continued unwillingness to undertake appraisals in the manner agreed should bring firm action from the pro vice chancellor’.

The value of the panopticon for Bentham, whose design it was, was that it represented a power relation operating in a mechanistic way, independent of the person who operates it. In practical terms there is the advantage of the exercise of power with the least cost, as the system is operational with limited manpower. Continuous and autonomous surveillance becomes the technology of power, as Bentham’s recommendations for it reveal:

it makes it possible to perfect the exercise of power. It does this in several ways: because it can reduce the number of those who exercise it, while increasing the numbers on whom it is exercised . . . its strength is that it never intervenes . . . it constitutes a mechanism whose effects follow from one another . . . it is a great new instrument of government; . . . its great excellence consists in the strength it is capable of giving to any institution it may be thought proper to apply it to’ (quoted in Foucault, 1977, p. 206).

The metaphor which emerges is that of visibility – making ‘possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 173). The emphasis is placed on observation, supervision, invigilation, ‘each actor is alone, perfectly individualised and constantly visible’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 200). It is not insignificant that of all the appraisal systems analysed none saw the unit to be examined as being the department, all identified the individual as the unit of production. The particular pattern of visibility which is chosen effects change in an organization. Some of the patterns illustrated here result in the gradual dissolution of collegial systems of organization and their replacement by more explicitly managerial forms. The position of ‘supervisor’ as monitor and evaluator becomes established. Equally the supervisor’s work is subject to evaluation and control. Themes of hierarchy and accountability emerge to the extent that an explicit and active managerial hierarchy becomes the organizing principle. The effect therefore, if not intent, of such a procedure is to resemble the panopticon.

The mechanism by which this takes place, however, is not at the instigation of a particular omniscient group or strata within the organization. It is not the exercise of some people with ‘power’ operating on those without. There is no ‘centre’ of power in the sense of a controlling or directing force, although one may be nominally identified. The ‘point of origin’ of these changes is dispersed. For Foucault it is the effect of ‘a multiplicity of often minor processes of different origins and scattered locations, which overlap, repeat or imitate one another, support one another’. Techniques which are invented for one purpose spill over into other aspects of a governmental role. Although actions are informed by a series of aims and objectives, with individuals and

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groups jockeying for advantage, this does not indicate that the broader consequences of these actions are co-ordinated. Introduced with the functional aim of improving individual and organizational performance through the provision of information, appraisal sets in train specific power dynamics, the effects of which over time are by and large unpredictable. As Foucault (1982, p. 787) phrases it ‘people know what they do, they know why they do it, but what they don’t know is what they do does’.

The effect may be to change the character of the organization, and the individual experiences of work sufficiently, the disciplinary effect of which may even be counter to the wishes of those who operate it. This may or may not happen. It is not an ‘unproblematic unfolding’. As Miller and Rose (1990, p. 10) remark, ‘whilst “governmentality” is eternally optimistic, “government” is a congenitally failing operation . . . the will to govern needs to be understood less in terms of its success than in terms of the difficulties of operationalising it’. These developments are not axiomatic or inexorable. There is always resistance to programming or rendering a sphere or an arena programmable, depending on the perceptions of those involved, and the extent to which resistance is articulated. Technologies are used by people for different means and result in unplanned outcomes or unexpected consequences. They may be modified according to those involved in its operation, or there may be collective patterns of resistance. As Hindess (1982) notes, power is not the playing out of a script. The privileging of a particular system of managing, conflicting with long established patterns of relationships between colleagues or personal definitions of what ‘the job’ entails, may prompt resistance. The emergence of a managerial role gives formal power but may detract from the authority and effectiveness likely to be required to introduce change, and thus be eschewed. Equally the productive role of power with appraisal acting as an aid to subjective well-being may lead to support for certain types of appraisal processes (Knights, 1990; Knights and Willmott, 1985).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article has been to contribute to debate on the study of management. Its premise has been to decentre ‘management’ as an organizing focus, arguing that a more productive approach to its study is generated by an investigation of the technologies or practices which give effect to managing. Practices have been examined for their power effects, without presupposing intention or imputing interests. In denying the link between power and interests, management is not reduced to the actions of a manager, or a coherent and calculating organizational force which holds power. Adopting Foucault’s ascending analysis of power – the study of power at its extremities – the lived experience of those within organizations is considered whilst at the same time enabling the constitutive effects of such practices to be considered.

Appraisal illustrates a technology active in the constitution of managing. It is an example of the operation of power/knowledge, rendering aspects of
existence thinkable, calculable, and thus manageable. Through an examination of the various stages in an appraisal process it is possible to see how texts help to articulate asymmetrical power relations and enhance the capillary functioning of power. Appraisal illustrates how knowledge of the individual and the work performed articulates the managerial role as a directional activity. The routinized provision of information operates so as to affect organizational segmentation and create new bases for administrative expertise, with patterns of organizational visibility articulating specific forms of management structure. Minute organizational procedures contribute to the transformation in the mode of government of organizations. In some cases there is a tendency for it to function over time by sedimenting a more hierarchical, centralized and disciplinary model of the organization.

A Foucauldian – ascending – analysis illustrates how activities initially become articulated as managerial, which, over time, acquire institutional consequences and actively create a managerial structure. It emphasizes that management, in both its role and structure, is not 'given' but evolves out of structured practices, constructed through processes which, over time, modify and reinforce institutional arrangements. This deconstruction of management and an examination of processes within organizations at their most basic levels helps to illustrate the processes of organizational transformation with greater clarity.

NOTE

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