

## A New History of Management

Concepts of 'good management' are generally derived from what is assumed to be a fundamental need to increase efficiency. But this approach is based on a specific and limited view of management's past. *A New History of Management* disputes these foundations. By reassessing conventional perspectives on the development of management theories and providing a critical outline of present-day management, it highlights alternative conceptions of good management focussed on ethical aims, sustainability and new views of good practice. This new history provides a platform from which scholars and reflective practitioners can develop alternative approaches for managing and organizing in the twenty-first century.

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## Preface and Acknowledgements

*And isn't the past inevitable,  
now that we call the little  
we remember of it 'the past'?*

William Matthews, from the poem *Cows Grazing at Sunrise*

*The object is to learn to what extent the effort to think one's  
own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and  
so enable it to think differently.*

Michel Foucault, from *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2

Charles (Chuck) Wrege passed away on 19 August 2014 as we were writing this book. Just before he died, he gave a presentation at an Academy of Management that we attended. In answer to a question from the floor about what advice he would offer to young management historians, Chuck said, 'You just have to work hard! Read and read the stuff again. It takes a long time. It's hard work.' We would like to dedicate *A New History of Management* to him.

Chuck was critical. Some would say an iconoclast. But he wasn't against management history, he was for it. He just thought management history should be done with more curiosity and more rigour than was often the case, and is especially the case with the way history is presented in management textbooks. And it is these textbook histories, the only place that most managers and management scholars encounter a history of our field, which we take as our target in this book.

*A New History of Management* is inspired by Chuck's spirit, but also by other pioneering management historians. We are critical of the little pieces of the past (to paraphrase William Flood) that have been distilled into a set of unquestioned and inevitable certainties that now

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bound the way management is presented to young scholars, and by association, limit their horizons for the future. But we are not necessarily critical of management historians like, for example, Lyndall Urwick and Daniel Wren. They were pioneers who wrote good management histories that were essential to moving the field forward in their times. Their insights have been reduced by later interpreters, but we have learned a lot from the coverage of the field in their original works.

What we present in this book is a new history of management written for our times. Throughout the chapters that follow, we develop an alternative history that counters those limited historical assumptions conveyed in management textbooks as foundations to management scholars and practitioners. We aim to show that these foundations are not as hard and fast as we might assume, and show that recognizing this can, in the words of Michel Foucault, ‘free thought from what it silently thinks and enable thinking differently’.

We have chosen the title of the book and the cover image to illustrate this counter-intuitive idea: that rather than seeking innovation or thinking differently by running away from the past, we can, instead, seek innovation by looking more deeply at our interpretations of the past and how these limit our horizons.

The title *A New History of Management* indicates that what we are presenting is not intended to be a new orthodoxy or ‘one best way’. It is ‘a’ history rather than ‘the’ history. In advocating that history is subjective and that any view of the past must be less than all that happened and based, at least partly, on the context of the present, we encourage the creation of other alternative management histories in addition to ours. Our history is not as comprehensive as Wren’s histories, not even close: but our aim was not to be comprehensive. Rather, our aim was to investigate how looking again and more deeply at those elements that are conventionally seen as management’s key foundations might highlight new insights and change the boundaries that our historical assumptions have, often unconsciously, placed

around the development of our field. It is, in this sense, a 'counter-history'.

The book's cover is a re-imagining of a classic image of the Bethlehem Steel works in Pennsylvania, where Frederick W. Taylor honed his management ideas. This image has often been used by management historians, perhaps drawn by the association with this new Bethlehem and the birth of a new subject for which Taylor was considered by many to be a messiah. Of course, the image that is traditionally used is an industrial working grey. The image on our cover, drawn by Brendon Palmer, is a colourful but decaying cartoon.

As Chuck put it in the words we quoted from him above, this approach to re-digging through the archive and rethinking management history is hard work. But while researching and writing this book has been difficult, we didn't do it all at once. It was a long time in the making.

Steve can recall going with a group from the University of Warwick to see John talk at a seminar at Keele University in 1992, when both of their research was beginning to engage with critical thinking and management history. Steve had just begun a PhD at Warwick focussed on how management's historical understanding of itself may limit present understandings and future endeavours in the subject. This led to a book called *Recreating Strategy*.

John's doctoral research at Aston was based on a multiple paradigm study of work behaviour in the UK Fire Service. One of the paradigm case accounts involved constructing a historical account of the labour process in fire-fighting based on archival materials held in Birmingham and London. John was completing his PhD research at Aston at the time Mick was starting his in the same department. After they completed their doctoral studies, they worked together on a study of the UK computer corporation, ICL, and then on a number of projects up to their recent papers on history in the *Academy of Management Review*.

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Todd started his PhD at Cambridge in 2001. Exploring the possibility of academic freedom in an increasingly commodified higher education sector led him to examine the history of business schools in the US and UK. Upon joining Steve at Victoria University of Wellington in 2006, they became aware of the common interest they shared in applying critical theory to question the institutions of management education and in the provenance of a number of the ideas and frameworks that they were teaching, such as Lewin's 'change as three steps', Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs', and Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy.

A number of meetings at various conferences eventually enabled the four of us to figure out that we were working in different ways with a similar purpose, and that we should join forces to create this book. So what we present here is the sum of many parts. But not only do we believe that the whole is greater than the sum of these parts, we are sure that it would not stand without all of the parts combined. In this respect, and because we all believe that it is a book that really did need to be written, it is a collaboration that we are all truly grateful for.

Given the length of time taken and the multiplicity of projects involved in the lead up, there is a large number of people to thank for helping us to get to this point: Gibson Burrell, Haridimos Tsoukas, Roger Dunbar, Gabrielle Durepos, Richard Dunford, Torkild Thanem, Scott Taylor, Donncha Kavanagh, Ellen O'Connor, Robert Cooper, Robert Chia, Elena Antonocopolou, Urs Daellenbach, David Wilson, Robin Wensley, Tom Cooper, Kenneth Brown, Duncan Angwin, Alex Faria, Rosemary Nixon, Kiren Shoman, Hugh Willmott, Chris Grey, Ann Cunliffe, Colm McLaughlin, Janet Tyson, John Ballard, John Alford, Albert Mills and Johnathan Brock.

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All of these people have contributed to the hard work of putting together a book with a simple message: if we want to think differently about management for the future, a good place to start would be to rethink what we assume to be its history.