

## Management Tools

No organisation is immune from the influence of management tools. Such tools as norms, indicators, ranking, evaluation grids and management control systems have moved outside the managerial and consultancy realm within which they were first developed to reach public administrations and policy-makers, as well as a range of other governmental and non-governmental organisations. Taking management tools out of the practical and utilitarian contexts to which they are often consigned and approaching them from a social analytical perspective, this book gives primacy to these everyday objects that constitute the background of organisational life and remain too often unquestioned. Bringing together developing streams of research from anthropology, political science, social psychology, sociology, accounting, organisation theory and management, Ève Chiapello and Patrick Gilbert offer an unprecedented theoretical synthesis that will help managers, scholars and policy-makers to unpack the functional and dysfunctional roles and effects of management tools within and across organisations.

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# Management Tools

## A Social Sciences Perspective

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The whole is the result of a research and teaching project nourished by the authors' previous work, in the sociology of accounting for one (Berland and Chiapello, 2009; Bourguignon and Chiapello, 2005; Chiapello, 2005, 2007; Chiapello and Desrosières, 2006),<sup>2</sup> and for the other, in human resources management (Gilbert, 1998a, 1998b) and information systems (Gilbert and Gonzalez, 2000; Gilbert and Leclair, 2004). This work was enriched along the way by countless conversations and discussions.

The event that set us on this journey was the 'Social and behavioural approaches to management tools'<sup>3</sup> seminar we set up in 2005 in connection with the Master in Research on Organisations<sup>4</sup> run jointly by HEC School of Management<sup>5</sup> and IAE

<sup>1</sup> It does not, however, contain the third part, comprising four case studies written by Corine Eyraud, Bénédicte Grall, Carine Chemin-Bouzir and Céline Baud.

<sup>2</sup> We should also mention the organisation of the 'First sociology and quantification days' (in collaboration with Alain Desrosières, Carlos Ramirez and Fabrice Bardet) in May 2002, the coordination (with Carlos Ramirez) of a special 'sociology of accounting' issue of *Comptabilité-Contrôle-Audit* in June 2004 (Chiapello and Ramirez, 2004), and the co-editing (with Richard Baker) of an issue of *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* focusing on the influence of French Theory on accounting research in 2011 (Chiapello and Baker, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Original French title: *Approches sociales et comportementales des outils de gestion*.

<sup>4</sup> DEA *Organisation appliquée*.

<sup>5</sup> Ève Chiapello was a Professor at HEC School of Management, Paris until March 2013. Since then she has been a Research Director at EHESS, Paris (*École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales*; School for the Advanced Studies in Social Sciences).

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<sup>6</sup> *IAE de Paris* is the School of Management of University of Paris 1-La Sorbonne (*Institut d'Administration des Entreprises*).

<sup>7</sup> *Habilitation à diriger des recherches*.

also with colleagues from other institutions, including Alain Desrosières (INSEE), Valérie Boussard (Université de Paris-Nanterre), Fabian Muniesa (Mines ParisTech), Corine Eyraud (Université de Provence), Dominique Bouteiller (HEC Montreal), François-Xavier de Vaujany and Bernard Colasse (Université de Paris-Dauphine), Yves Cohen (EHESS), Maya Leroy (Agro Paristech), François Pichault (Université de Liège) and Frédérique Pigeyre (Université de Paris-Est). Productive interactions with other colleagues – who are too numerous to name individually – occurred at symposia and conferences (*Association Française de Sociologie*, *Association francophone de Gestion des Ressources Humaines*, *Association Internationale de Psychologie du Travail de Langue Française*), visits to other universities, and debates inside research teams.

This intellectual journey was punctuated by milestones in the form of intermediate publications. Philippe Steiner and François Vatin provided the initial opportunity to provide a first introduction to the sociology of management tools when they invited us to contribute to their book *Traité de sociologie économique* (Chiapello and Gilbert, 2009). An article discussing the clinical critique of management tools, published in *Le travail humain* (Chiapello and Gilbert, 2012), was a chance to test our prototype method for exposing the research theses contributing to social analysis of management tools, and launch the debate.

To bring this work to fruition, we benefited from input from other researchers sharing our interest in studying management tools, who very willingly agreed to write for the book. Bénédicte Grall (lecturer at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers), Marion Brivot (associate professor at Université Laval au Québec) and Carine Chemin-Bouzir (associate professor at Neoma Business School) were all involved in the literature review;<sup>8</sup> the book would have been the

<sup>8</sup> Thesis 4 was written by Carine Chemin-Bouzir, thesis 6 was written by Marion Brivot and thesis 7 by Bénédicte Grall. Their signature is found in a footnote at the start of each thesis.

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poorer without their contribution. They also agreed to update their parts of the book in preparation for publication of the English-language version.

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This book is especially dedicated to Alain Desrosières, who passed away on 15 February 2013. Our many discussions with him and our reading of his work were a crucial part of the genesis of this book, and he is sadly missed.



## How to Use This Book

This book is for anyone who wants a relatively comprehensive exploration of much of the social thinking on management tools. It has been written for people who are interested in the way management tools are influencing individual and group behaviours in organisations.

It can be used in a number of ways, depending on the reader's specialisation, experience and interests. It can be read from beginning to end because it follows an organised sequence. But each chapter, and each of the ten theses in the second part, can also be read separately, as appropriate to the area of literature the reader wants to address. It can be used both as a textbook for a course, and as a reference book that is consulted to inform thinking or analysis.

The book originated in our teaching and research supervision activities, and was initially conceived as a reference manual for doctoral or post-doctoral research, since no book existed that gave an overview of the wide range of management tool-related research going on in a number of management disciplines, and more broadly in the social sciences. The second part provides a digest of the major theoretical streams that are casting light on the question. It contains summary tables describing the object of study, the theses and their contributions. Each thesis is backed up with an extensive bibliography for further reading. We consider these theses complementary, to be called on as and when relevant to the management situations and economic climates encountered. The appendices offer suggestions for successful social science research that takes management tools seriously, and a guide for combining approaches as appropriate to the research questions addressed.

The book can thus be used to construct a Ph.D. or Research Master level course in Management, Sociology or Political Sciences designed to train students in these approaches. After an introductory

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session based on Chapters 1 and 2, a certain number of theses from the second part can be selected for closer examination in dedicated sessions. As well as the part of the book presenting the chosen thesis, it is advisable to have the students read some of the key works cited. Chapter 6 and the conclusion are useful for a final summing-up session. For assessment, we recommend asking the students to carry out a study of a management tool.

A similar approach can also be used to construct classes for top-level business schools where 'management tools' are not supposed to be taken for granted, and teaching is informed by cutting-edge research. In such establishments the book can be used as a supplementary resource for MBA, MSc, and Executive MBA teaching. MBA and EMBA module students are always keen to learn about management tools, and this book is an excellent instrument for bringing fundamental social science debates on the potential and limitations of such tools into the classroom. For instance, the book can be given to practitioners/MBA students as a comprehensive guide for analysing a specific tool in their workplace, with the potential to serve as a textbook for an entire module. Business school students who already have some professional experience are often very interested in re-examining familiar management tools under different analysis grids. For this type of student, we recommend focusing work on the ideas from the second part, which they must learn to handle. It is also important to have them work in small groups on real-life case studies chosen by the students themselves, which will require them to collect additional documents, visit businesses and conduct interviews. Our teaching experience suggests that students always love management tools and want to learn about them.

A course of this kind can provide an enjoyable complement to an Organisational Behaviour or Organisation Theory course. Chapter 2 of this book, which reviews organisation theories from the perspective of management tools, provides a good way in to the subject. The book also could be adapted to develop an ad hoc module on tools for specific disciplines, for example HRM tools (e.g., HR planning, job evaluation),

Strategy tools (e.g., Five Forces, PESTEL, BCG Matrix), Sustainability-CSR tools (e.g., GRI, reporting tools, business case and supply-chain analysis tools, norms and standards for implementing sustainability, CSR ratings), accounting and control tools (e.g., performance indicators, accounting standards) or marketing tools (e.g., customer-management tools, segmentation), using the different perspectives to unpack a pre-selected set of tools from the disciplines. In this case, the teacher must take care to select appropriate additional reading.

Finally, outside the academic world, practising professionals who specialise in a functional field (management control, HR management, information systems, operations management, or other fields), working in business or as consultants, can make use of the analysis grids provided for their diagnoses. The third part provides a grid for the systematic study of the effects of any management tool. The methodological complements of the conclusion and the appendices also supply useful resources for conducting an in-depth study.

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