

Learning how to be a modern manager while sitting on the sofa: the role of television in diffusing and legitimising management practices

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Introduction

If we follow Heraclitus – “You cannot step twice into the same river; for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you” – then we must argue that there is a continuous process of transformation, that things are in a constant state of becoming, and that the world changes and is changeable (Chia, 1999). Applying this to the realm of organisations in general, and management in particular, managers are faced with a rapidly changing environment – the social, economic and cultural contexts within which they work – and so new managerial techniques are seen to become necessary to deal with the latest challenges and that new and different ways are found to deal with existing issues. Sometimes these new techniques become fashions: TQM, 6-Sigma, Balanced Scorecard and Business Process Reengineering had (or are still having) their day in the sun. Recent examples of new practices are the ever shifting boundaries of responsibilities, consultification and the projectisation of organisations.

What processes must have taken place so that HR managers or operations managers somehow ‘know’ that they have to do things differently from the way they did things five or fifteen years ago? How do they learn what the latest management trends are? The creation and diffusion of management theories and practice is generally viewed as a three stage process (Mazza and Alvarez, 2000): business schools and consulting firms produce the knowledge, the business press disseminates it, and then there is a process of legitimization as these theories become part of ‘common sense’ and form the standard managerial discourse through their representation in non-business media. An ever increasing amount of attention has been paid to the first two of these stages (e.g. Huczynski, 1993; Mazza and Alvarez, 2000; Alvarez, Mazza and Pedersen, 2005; Frenkel, 2005), but relatively little has been paid to how management knowledge might be diffused through other methods. This paper is an attempt to address this gap.

The paper takes as its premise that the existing social and economic system influences the

form and content of cultural products, and that the consumption of these artefacts then has an influence on those who consume them. Accordingly, I argue that the management styles and techniques that are depicted in cultural products play a role in the dissemination of management knowledge and practices by depicting what managers should (and should not) be like and what they should (and should not) be doing. This paper concentrates on the role of television programmes in this process, because watching TV is the most common leisure activity of people living in the West. American men and women, for instance, spend respectively 2.82 and 2.03 hours per day during the week and 3.56 and 2.91 hours per day during the weekend (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011) in front of the TV. Britons watch even more TV: on average just over four hours per day (Ofcom, 2013). This paper argues, then, that television dramas and comedies are an important means for the diffusion of management practices. As Fiske and Hartley (1978: 4, italics in original) state in their classic text:

“Both language and television mediate reality [...] Language is the means by which men enter society to produce reality [...] Television extends this ability, and an understanding of the way in which television structures and presents its picture of reality can go a long way towards helping us to understand the way in which our society works.”

I deal below with some of the mechanisms involved.

Films and television programmes have not been ignored in discussions of the dissemination of management knowledge. However, when they have been discussed in relation to management knowledge, this has usually been to show how they can be a useful resource in the classroom for discussion of particular themes. For example, Champoux (2001) states that teachers can use the constant inability of the Warner Brothers' cartoon character Wile E. Coyote to catch the Road Runner to demonstrate the necessity of developing a strategy based on an analysis of the external environment:

“Coyote is an example of a manager moving forward in a headstrong way without a clear plan. He does little careful analysis or clear analytical planning. Wile E. deals with events as they happen instead of outlining contingencies and preparing for them in advance. Road Runner is an example of a competitor with the skills and tactics to outwit Wile E. Coyote.” (Champoux, 2001: 83).

Similarly, Huczynski and Buchanan (2004) suggest using film to explore controversial management themes while Watson (2012) analyses a TV Western in order to conceptualise

leadership and Rhodes (2001) uses the television cartoon *The Simpsons* as a lens through which to understand organisations. There are also a number of popular management books that are based on television figures. One can learn leadership as practised by Capt. Picard of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (Roberts and Ross, 1996), by mobster Tony Soprano (Schneider, 2004), by the participants of the series *The Apprentice* (Robin, 2005) and by the cartoon character SpongeBob SquarePants (Conley, 2004). These books take episodes from the respective programmes and show how the management style of the hero can be applied to the everyday workplace. These authors are using programmes specifically as a source for lessons about management or as a tool to analyse management and organisations. This paper, on the other hand, focuses on the management practices that are depicted in the programmes that are being watched as a source of entertainment and not as a component in a management education course, and whose management-related content is not the primary focus of their audience.

I am not dealing with how television programmes reflect society at a more general level or show the *typical* (in the sense of Lukàcs); for instance Fiske and Hartley (1978: 171) describe how the police drama *A Man Called Ironside* (1967-1975)¹ “is a conscious enactment of the values of an ordered, stable, liberal-conservative society.” It is not my intent to make similar kinds of statements. Nor am I carrying out in this paper detailed content or visual analyses of television programmes. Similarly, specifically excluded from this research are documentaries, chat shows and interviews with academics and managers. Docu-soaps such as *The Apprentice*, *Dragons’ Den*, *Britain’s Best Boss* or *Undercover Boss* are also not dealt with in the paper. To be considered for discussion, the programme has to have appeared on one of the main British or American television channels (UK: BBC 1, BBC 2, ITV, Channel 4; US: ABC, CBS, NBC, HBO).

The discussion concentrates on programmes those that have been produced in the last thirty years and productions from Britain and the US. Other countries’ television industries have similar products, but these are not as well known as those from the English-speaking world – *Law and Order* (1990-2010) and *CSI* (2000-present) are on television every day in Germany, but *Tatort* (a long-running police series, first shown in 1970 and still on) has never been shown in Britain or the US. On the other hand, US programmes in particular are to be found

¹ Now being remade. It will be interesting to compare the two.

everywhere on TV: a German viewer watching TV on 29 or 30 May 2013 would have been able to watch on basic channels the comedies *How I Met Your Mother*, *New Girl*, and *The New Normal* and the police series *Rizzoli and Isles*, *King*, *Psych*, *Criminal Minds*, *Criminal Minds: Suspect Behavior*, *Navy CIS*, *CSI: Miami*, *Law and Order*, *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, and *Crossing Jordan* - here we can already note a possible mechanism through which management ideas might travel.

Following a brief review of the history of management thought, the paper then pays attention to the relationship between economic and social structures and cultural products, and then considers how cultural products can influence those who read, see, hear or watch them. Following this, the paper discusses how changes and developments in management techniques, methods and approaches are evident in TV dramas and comedies.

History of Management Thought

Before discussing how television programmes disseminate management knowledge, it is useful first to review briefly the history of management styles before considering how these are in evidence in television programmes. Braverman (1974: 68) states, "Control is indeed the central concept of all management systems". Different types of management control have emerged from the theories of management that have been developed by practitioners and managerialist academics over the years. Three main approaches can be identified in the literature on management theory: classical, human relations and systems (e.g. Witzel (2011) or Clegg, Kornberger and Pitsis (2008)).

The *classical approach* has two main strands: scientific management and bureaucracy. Most closely associated with scientific management is Frederick Taylor, although others made substantial contributions, not least Gilbreth with his time-and-motion methods (as demonstrated in the 'biopic' film *Cheaper by the Dozen* (1950)).² Taylor's theories of scientific management lie at the heart of mass assembly line work, as exemplified by the production lines introduced by Henry Ford, but were also introduced into offices. Just as the production line needed to be controlled and organised, so too did organisations themselves. The characteristics of bureaucracies were identified by Weber. The goal of bureaucracy is to use rational-legal rules to structure the organisation and to separate the person from the rules.

² See the note about *Cheaper by the Dozen* at the end of this paper.

Thus there is specialisation, hierarchy of authority, a system of rules and impersonality. The bureaucrat simply exercises technical and professional expertise in a non-partisan way.

The *Human Relations approach* developed as managers started to realise that the scientific management approach was a source of problems, especially lower productivity. Basing his ideas on the Hawthorn experiments at the Western Electric Company between 1924-1932, Mayo reference argued for an approach which humanised the workplace. He and his followers suggested that more attention needed to be paid to social factors and behaviour. This approach emphasises the importance of work groups, improved communication with workers, motivation, and a stress on personnel management. In addition to Mayo, other theorists representative of the human relations approach include Lewin and his work on groups, Maslow with his hierarchy of needs, Herzberg and his hygiene factors reference, and McGregor with Theory X and Theory Y: they all argue that workers are not motivated only by money, but have more complex needs that must be met if the organisation is to be successful. The work of many management gurus today goes in this direction, particularly those like Peters and Waterman (1982) who emphasise the need for management of corporate culture to provide an environment where workers feel valued. Similarly, work on learning organisations (e.g. Senge (1990)) suggests that fulfilled workers are the most productive.

The *Systems approach* views organisations as a number of inter-related systems, and attempts to combine the two earlier approaches. The organisation is viewed as an open system which interacts with broader external environment. When making decisions, managers must take into account social, psychological factors as well as structural and technological requirements.

Characters in films and television programmes can be seen to use these different management styles and techniques. The next section of the paper addresses the mechanisms involved.

Base and superstructure, cultural products and identity

In this section I investigate two linkages: that between social and economic structures and art, and second, that between the work of art³ and the individual.

Implicit in this paper is the concept that a work of art, such as a TV programme, contains

³ I use the phrase 'work of art' in a very broad way. I do not differentiate in this paper between 'high' or 'low' art, between 'movies' or 'films', between soap opera and *The Wire*.

traces of the society in which it was produced. The relationship between the content of a work of art and the broader social conditions that led to its production has been widely discussed, not least since Marx (2000) stated in the 1859 preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*

“The sum total of these relations of production constitute the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general.”

Thus the base/superstructure debate was brought into existence. The undialectical thoughts of vulgar Marxists that there is a mechanical determination by the economic base of the superstructure have largely been discounted. Many theorists worked on this theme; here I mention just one – Althusser. He showed that straightforward economic determinism was an unsatisfactory explanation and suggested that there was a social formation consisting of three practices or instances, the economic, the political and the ideological, which allows for an analysis of the “relative autonomy of the superstructure with respect to the base [and] the reciprocal action of the superstructure with respect to the base.” (Althusser, 1971: 130).

Althusser borrowed the concept of overdetermination from Freudian psychoanalysis, where it means that a symptom can have several roots. He argues that any particular social construct (e.g. a particular form of art) may be overdetermined by instances of the economic, the political and the ideological. For Althusser, the economy is not all-determining, so there is the possibility of different developments among the practices. However, the instances are hierarchised, with the economic determining which should be dominant in a given mode of production (Lapsley and Westlake, 2006).

“On the one hand, determination in the last instance by the economic mode of production; on the other the relative autonomy of the superstructures and their specific autonomy [but] from the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the last instance never comes.” (Althusser, 1969: 111-113)

So while it may not be possible to state exactly what has determined the content of a work of art, the economic instance plays a role. As the economic instance changes, so do the social constructs. Thus when the economic conditions in society bring about new techniques of management, these will be visible in the products that the culture industry produces.

Works of art, by their very nature, are part of the ideological instance. Althusser proposes that ideology is “the imaginary relation of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (ibid.: 153), i.e. it is a relationship to the world and it is through this that the individual constitutes herself or himself as a subject. Each individual is addressed in various terms when engaging in social practices, and this confers a social identity: “all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as subjects” (ibid. 162). Interpellation takes place in part through what Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatuses, like education, the family and media. It is through these that people gain their sense of reality and understanding of their identity. This has even been shown in film: Hunter (2003) illustrates this process in his discussion of the movie *Boiler Room* (2000), which is about a group of young men who sell questionable financial products. This film has scenes where characters refer to other films that deal with the business world – *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1992) and *Wall Street* (1993). The characters in *Boiler Room* use film to create their identities, just as the audience of *Boiler Room* use that film to model their own identities. These works of fiction both reflect organisational life, and reproduce it, in that the audience draws conclusion about how to behave in the workplace in part from what it sees on screen.

A further attempt to avoid deterministic and reductionist explanations of the link between material and cultural production and consumption is the “circuit of culture” model of du Gay et al. (1997) as shown in Figure 1. du Gay et al. argue (1997: 2)

“Because cultural processes dealt with seemingly less tangible things – signs, images, language, beliefs – they were often assumed, particularly by Marxist theorists, to be ‘superstructural’, being both dependent upon and reflective of the primary status of the material base [...] Rather than being seen as merely reflective of other processes- economic or political – culture is now regarded as being as constitutive of the social worlds as economic or political processes.”

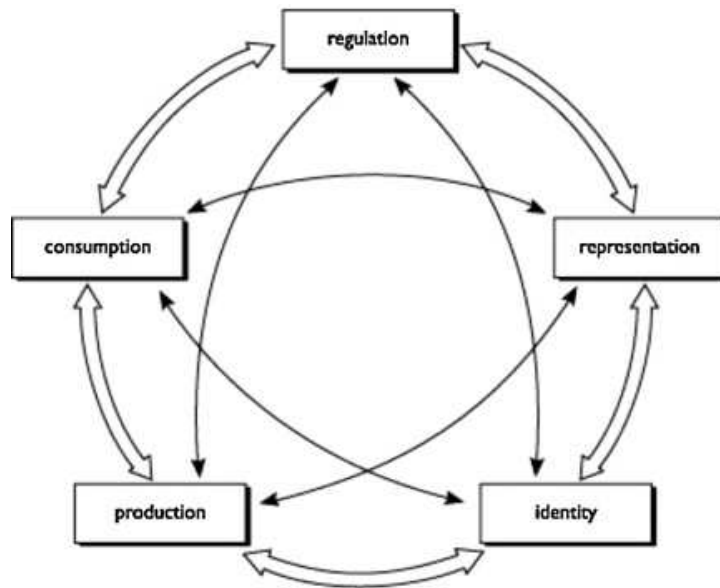


Figure 1. The Circuit of Culture (du Gay et al., 1997)

The five elements of the circle are:

1. *Representation* is about how signs are used in a cultural artefact to present a meaningful concept. The content, form and means of distribution all play a role in communicating the intended meaning: “[...] signs and symbols [are] used to represent or re-present whatever exists in the world in terms of a meaningful concept, image or idea.” (ibid.: 13).
2. *Production* deals with the processes through which the cultural product comes to exist and with the meanings that are encoded into the products. Television texts are generally constructed in such a way that there is a dominant and preferred reading of them, i.e. the consumer of the text is pushed in a given direction (Moore, 1997)
3. *Consumption* covers the ways in which the consumers of the artefact decode its messages and create meaning as they use it in their daily lives. It is concerned how people interpret the signifiers in the text they are consuming.
4. *Identity*: as the artefact is being consumed, and after it has been consumed and meaning is constructed and internalised, the cultural product is used to form individual and group identities.
5. *Regulation* covers the various forms of control, both formal (regulations, laws and institutionalised systems) and informal (cultural norms and expectations) which tell us what meanings are acceptable and correct. For instance, television dramas are expected (with very few exceptions like *Lost* (2004-2010)) to have a beginning, a middle and an end, and it is very rare for the villain to get away with it.

As Figure 1 shows, the relationships between these five elements are complex and one must be aware of the danger of analysing them in isolation – they each form part of a whole. Nevertheless, this is a useful model, and this paper suggests it shows a framework within which processes exist that affect the content of programmes and how people ‘read’ them. The programmes under discussion in this paper influence how individuals construct their identity as – and behave as – managers. As individuals watch television programmes, this leads them to an unacknowledged opinion of how a manager should behave and act. In other words, the programmes help to shape the discourse of management to the point where it becomes ‘common sense’ (Gramsci, 1971) that a manager should act in the way that is constantly being paraded before them on the television screen.

Having established a framework for understanding the relationship between cultural products and social and economic structure, I now briefly review some mechanisms through which a television programme affects individuals – how does what individuals see on the screen play a role in their identity and behaviour?

As Bandura (1977: 1) says, “Many theories have been advanced over the years to explain why people behave as they do.” Cultivation and social cognitive theories can help explain “how and why exposure to television programmes affects perceptions, values, and behavior” (Park and Villar, 2011: 80). They show how cultivation theory explores the ways in which general television consumption affects perceptions of reality:

“Behavior in cultivation theory often asserts itself in response to exaggerated media content (number of police officers, crime, lawyers, and criminals as portrayed on television) mostly through inaction to do things or go places due to fear. Here, the exaggerated television world can become the “perceptual reference” point for heavy viewers, which can influence behaviour” (ibid.)

Social cognitive theory (sometimes referred to as social learning theory), on the other hand, treats the individual as being less passive, and allows for the possibility of responding to what one sees by actively responding and adjusting one’s behaviour through a process known as modelling.

Bandura (1977, 2001) himself developed social learning theory which argues that individuals modify their behaviour after undergoing a learning process initiated by observing one of the following three types of models:

- Live model, where someone demonstrates a desired behaviour,
- Verbal instruction, where the desired behaviour is described in detail, and
- Symbolic, where a real or fictional character demonstrates a form of behaviour using one of the forms of media, which include fiction and non-fiction books, documentaries and fictional films and television programmes.

Clearly, the last of these is of interest here. It implies a form of identification between consumer of the text and fictional character, which would underlie the mechanism of the suggestion being made in this paper that viewers learn from what they see on the TV screen, through the *consumption* and *identity* elements of du Gay's et al. (1997) model. This is an assumption, though, and many researchers have investigated the question of does what we see affect what we do? Does watching violent films make you violent? Or as Sestir and Green (2010: 274) put it, "[...] can viewing a narrative produce changes in something as central as the viewer's self-concept?" And a key moderator that they identify is character identification. Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) reviewed the concept and show how, in the literature on mass media, identification refers firstly to the process by which an individual puts himself or herself in the place of a character and vicariously participates in the character's experiences during a programme. A second aspect of identification has also been described – wishful identification – where viewers feel that they would really like to be the people in the programme.⁴ Bandura (2001) contends that the modelling process goes far beyond simple identification and imitation of behaviour to include changing one's attitudes and values to match those of a model. Giles (2003: 194) makes the point that "In cases where we identify with the figure, we may go on to incorporate some of that figure's behaviour into our own." Such wishful identification is linked to a greater or lesser extent to the following traits and characteristics of the character (Hoffner and Buchanan, 2005):

- perceived intelligence,
- success,
- attractiveness,
- humour,

⁴ An extreme form of identification is parasocial interaction (PSI) which is a state where the fictional character has the function of being a companion or even friend. PSI occurs when the viewer of a programme responds to a character as if he/she/it were a real person (Giles, 2003).

- willingness to be violent (this is important for male viewers in contexts where violence “makes sense” in terms of narrative traditions), and
- admiration by other characters.

TV and film producers are aware that having characters with whom the audience can identify can play a key role in determining the success of a production (Giles, 2003). This corresponds to the *production* element of the du Gay model – producers deliberately have such characters in order to build a large audience. In their study of Euston Films, who produced *The Sweeney* (1975-1978) (among other series, like *Minder*, *Out* and *Fox*), Alvarado and Stewart (1985) show how the characters of Regan and Carter were created to be sympathetic to the audience, being dynamic, personable, in particular in comparison to Haskins, their bureaucratic boss.

Management Practices on Television

It has been shown that form and content cultural products are related to underlying social and economic factors, and that they are used by individuals to help in the construction of their identity. It was suggested that the television products of mass popular culture are one way through which management knowledge is disseminated. It was also seen that theories of management have evolved over the years: scientific management was the first of the approaches to be developed, and started to lose popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, when the human relations approach started to gain popularity, while the systems approach found increasing favour from the 1970s. It is now time to see how television programmes reflected some of these developments. It should be noted that scientific management is not well represented in television programmes (because they did not exist at the absolute height of its popularity) but is particularly well represented in films (often critically, cf. *Modern Times* (1936) and *Metropolis* (1927)), and will not be discussed in this paper (but see the note at the end of the paper).

No attempt is made here to provide comprehensive coverage of all television programmes, as the intent is to provide examples of how management theories and practices are mediated and diffused. The reader will be able to use his or her own viewing experience to complement what is mentioned below. The discussion concentrates on English-language television programmes that have been produced in the last thirty years or so. There are two reasons for

this. First, the sheer volume of material imposes its own limits on even the most dedicated television viewer, who has to eat and sleep as well as watch videos. Second, the reader is more likely to be aware of more recent productions than those from the distant past, and those from the English-speaking world (despite the recent trend in the UK of watching Scandinavian police dramas).

Primetime television provides a great deal of information about the world of work, showing many types of organisation and different kinds of workplace, but there is a bias towards the kind of workplace where televisual drama is more likely, like hospitals, police stations and lawyers' offices, and my examples in the first part of this section are from one of these workplaces – the police, where I investigate what police drama series have to say about teamwork. In the second part of this section I turn my attention to television comedies to show how the viewer can learn what not to do as a manager.

A particularly clear example of how management practices are reflected in a drama is the BBC's *Life on Mars* (2006-2007) which reveals within a single programme the theories and practices of management of two eras. The programme depicts what happens to a detective who somehow seems to travel back in time from 2006 to 1973. Among the main themes in the programme are clashes between the two central characters about issues related to police procedure (e.g. suspects' rights) and about wider issues like sexism and racism. The detective inspector (Gene Hunt) from the 1970s treats his staff very differently to the way which the detective from 2006 (Sam Tyler) expects to be treated. Whereas Tyler expects to be consulted on how to proceed with the investigation, he soon learns that subordinates of people like Hunt tended to be issued orders with little or no explanation.

“Hunt puts away the baddies, does not mind bending the rules as long as it is for the right cause, does not break the ethical code of being a police officer, and is ultimately a working-class hero who represents the anti-establishment challenges to bureaucracy, form-filling and *managerialism*.” (Garland and Bilby, 2011: 120, my italics)

Life on Mars captures two approaches to management – the directive approach which was still in wide existence in the 1970s, and the collaborative, rule-following approach which followed it and which was needed because the older management practice was no longer adequate.

Crime Series and How to Manage

Initiatives like JIT, TQM and BPR were introduced in the 1970s and placed a great deal of emphasis on teamwork. These ideas either started in the US (BPR – eg Hammer and Champy (1993)) or were popularised by US academics (eg Juran (1970) and Deming (1986)) and became important parts in managers' toolboxes around the world. Management relies on formal and official methods of control, but also on informal means of control (Edwards, 1979). Traditional bureaucratic surveillance and control are inadequate for JIT and TQM systems so a more effective system of surveillance is needed (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992). The worker's team may be found responsible for the poor quality and therefore subjected to discipline; therefore, team members act as surveillance for other team members. Much responsibility is pushed downwards from management; teams have a certain amount of discretion in deciding how to organise their work, so, for instance, if a team member is absent, the other team members must decide how to cover for them (ibid.). Teams represent a form of control (Thompson and McHugh, 1995).

Crime shows and team work

Police dramas are popular with programme makers because they make possible the depiction of workplaces full of people doing non-boring jobs, and the emotional intensity and dramatic tension attached to the work are compatible with the public's love of glamour (Hassard and Holliday, 1998). *Dixon of Dock Green* was shown on BBC television from 1955 to 1976. The eponymous hero, George Dixon, is a 'bobby' who deals with minor local crimes. *Dragnet* was a police programme set in Los Angeles, and aired from 1951 to 1957; its main protagonist, Sergeant Joe Friday, also deals local crimes (although they may be more serious than those with which George Dixon is involved). What is strikingly similar about both these series is the way in which the main protagonists deal with their superiors. Both George Dixon and Joe Friday are deferential, and they accept whatever instructions they are given without any question – they simply assume that if a superior tells them to do something, it is the right thing to do. Neither Dixon nor Friday bend the rules or work outside the system in order to achieve their goals.

In the 1970s police dramas reflected the questioning of bureaucratic management techniques. In Britain, several police dramas featured 'maverick cops', but without a doubt the best of these was *The Sweeney*, which aired on ITV from 1975 to 1978. The main character, Inspector Jack Regan of the Flying Squad, is played by John Thaw as a hard-drinking rebel

who will stop at almost nothing to catch the criminals. He bends the rules, sometimes uses violence and is very unwilling to follow orders from his supervisor, especially when he perceives that these orders will prevent him from doing his job. For Regan, results matter, not how he achieves them – he despises bureaucracy and ignores its rules. That the way in which Regan and Carter (his sergeant) were shown on screen was obviously admired by the members of the real Flying Squad, because they invited the actors several times to dinners (Hurd, 1981). Hurd (ibid.: 67) interestingly points out that

“An interesting comparison could be made between police films and television films of the 1950s which sought to emphasize the technological infrastructure of criminal investigation and the current [1970s – 1980s] emphasis on the human dimension.”

A similar philosophy lay behind the US programme *Starsky and Hutch* (1975-1979). Less violent than *The Sweeney*, and without the same ‘edge’, this programme also showed two policemen who sometimes had to bend the rules laid out for them by their superior (the gruff Captain Dobey) in order to catch the criminals. *Miami Vice’s* (1984-1989) policemen also tended to operate independently of rules whenever necessary.

The Sweeney and *Starsky and Hutch* show catching criminals as an effort made by talented and dedicated individuals who follow few rules. Several more recent police dramas depict catching criminals as a team effort. In the UK, *The Bill* was on air from 1984 to 2010. During that time, there have been many changes in the way senior officers manage the police officers at the police station where the characters are based; an authoritarian management style has been replaced by one that emphasises teamwork. A detailed review by O’Sullivan and Sheridan (2005) of four episodes from 2004 that deal specifically with management style shows how the old management style was replaced by what they call New Public Management, which emphasises professionalism, competency in management, a focus on the client, a consultative approach and treating employees fairly. Their in-depth reading concludes that the new style of management is presented more far more positively than the old one.

Law and Order (and its brand offshoots, *Law and Order: Criminal Intent* (2001-2011) and *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* (1999-present)) is an American production that was on

air from 1990 to 2010. It shares with *The Bill* a depiction of management style which is non-authoritarian. The detectives and prosecutors in these programmes are treated as knowledge workers, and generally are provided with only general instructions – they are left to do their work as they see fit. The individualism of a Jack Regan or Starsky is not wanted in these workplaces; these workers are expected to be team players. This is made evident by *Law and Order*, which saw many of its main characters replaced every couple of years. The viewer is led to the conclusion that there is not much room for stars in these work teams.

Smoothly functioning teams have been depicted as desirable in many other television programmes. *Hill Street Blues* (US, 1981-1987), *NYPD Blue* (US, 1993-2005), *Homicide: Life on the Street* (US, 1993-1999), *The Cops* (GB, 1998-2000) and *Merseybeat* (GB, 2001-2004) are other examples of programmes that moved away from the depiction of a single, heroic character to showing how ‘getting the job done’ needs a team effort. *The Wire* (US, 2002-2008) is one of the most highly praised police dramas ever, and it too emphasises teamwork, and shows how the team members (generally) prevent each other from going too far in their efforts to make an arrest. None of these programmes had a star as the main character, but were ensemble pieces, reflecting the kind of workplace that modern management theorists desire. These, and other similar programmes (such as hospital based programmes like *Casualty*, *St. Elsewhere* and *ER*) are concerned with the challenges of work, but they also present the workplace as somewhere to which the employee should be committed. Working in each organisation is depicted as being part of a ‘family’: the workplace is a source of a feeling of community. The characters share a common goal – to solve the crime, to heal the sick – there is a professional code that has to be followed. The teams are committed to each other and to the job.

Even a programme like *The Wire*, set in a decaying Baltimore where drug dealers run parts of the city with impunity, where politicians are craven and corrupt and where the top-level bosses are also depicted in a negative light, does not stray too far from this model of management. The way in which the chiefs of police are depicted is in contrast to those lower down the chain of command, where a commitment to the team and to arresting the bad guys is still in place, despite the restrictions put in the way of the detectives by their superiors. The craven, career-obsessed and selfish superiors serve as counter-examples of what a good manager should be like.

The role of the manager in many of these programmes is to set the tone and create the right kind of environment for their staff to help them get their job done, i.e. to be an ‘enabler’. Gil Grissom in *CSI* and Lt. van Buren in *Law and Order* are representative of the kind of manager and supervisor that is now depicted on television. They manage their team, and do their best to make sure that the team has adequate resources, and they provide guidance. They are not authoritarian, nor bureaucratic. Their managerial practices are those which are taught today in business schools.

TV Comedy – showing how not to be a manager.

Comedies like *The Simpsons* allow the audience to laugh at organisations and their incompetent managers (Rhodes, 2001; Czarniawska & Rhodes, 2006); the audience of these comedies learns how *not* to be a manager or supervisor. *Monty Python’s Flying Circus* (1969-1973) on BBC television included many sketches which poked fun at bureaucracy and overzealous managers. *Are You Being Served?* ran on the BBC from 1973 to 1985 and the two managers portrayed, Capt. Peacock and Mr Rumbold, are very frequently criticised to sticking too zealously to rules, regulations and the ‘right way’ of doing things. Capt. Peacock is arrogant and concerned with status symbols and asserting his authority and Mr Rumbold is extremely very fussy. Capt. Mainwaring in *Dad’s Army* (1968-1977) shares many of the same characteristics. *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin* (1976-1979) contains one of the sharpest critiques of poor management skills. The CEO of the company where Reginald works is known as CJ and has no idea about how to actually run an organisation, his pomposity is regularly skewered and he is made a figure of fun with his pieces of managerial wisdom, such as “I didn’t get where I am today by trusting easy chairs.” In *The Brittas Empire* (on BBC from 1991 to 1997) Gordon Brittas is the archetypal middle manager of a leisure centre. He has no idea how to actually manage people despite the number of personal development courses he has attended, and his efforts always prevent the team from functioning smoothly. Montgomery Burns, the owner of the nuclear plant in *The Simpsons* is depicted as venal, selfish, uncaring and oppressive. The character Johnson from Channel 4’s *The Peep Show* (2003-2012) is a loan manager in a financial institution and is shown as being initially impressive, but it later becomes clear that he is inauthentic as a person – over-slick and over-smooth. An even sharper critique of bureaucracies and bureaucratic management was provided in *Yes Minister* (1980-1988). Set in the civil service, each episode deals with the impossibility of achieving a great deal in a bureaucracy. Evasiveness, defending one’s status, sticking to procedures and other such behaviour is very heavily criticised.

The characters Capt. Peacock, CJ, Gordon Brittas and Johnson represent the struggles of managers trying to come to terms with the changing nature of the workplace and the new management styles that were required. One character who thinks he is following the latest in management practices is, of course, David Brent of *The Office* (2001-2002): “Brent is in tune with the nature of the contemporary workplace” (Walters, 2005: 139). Brent extols the notion of teamwork, and talks about trust, team and family. Brent himself certainly professes to believe in contemporary management theories about human resources:

“What’s the single most important thing for a company? Is it the building? Is it the stock? Is it the turnover? It’s the people, investment in people ... What upsets me about the job? Wasted talent. People could come to me, and they could go, ‘Excuse me, David, but you’ve been in the business twelve years. Can you spare us a moment to tell us how to run a team, how to keep them task-orientated as well as happy?’ But they don’t. That’s the tragedy.” (The Office, Ii)

Brent’s management style obviously does not work, and is criticised by the staff who move to his office from the Swindon branch:

“We’re actually used to doing stuff, like. Working hard, you know, being motivated. But there’s not much dynamism out there, is there? I mean, people look like they’re getting away with murder.”(The Office, Iiii)

Brent’s tragedy is that he is deluded about his own management skills, although his staff clearly do see through his favouritism, his sexism and racism and his professed team-spirit to the underlying selfishness. Brent epitomises the need to look out for Number One – despite any protestations to the contrary. This becomes clear in the last episode of the first series, where Brent celebrates because he has been promoted, even though his promotion means the loss of some jobs (in the end, the promotion falls through). When he makes a visit to the warehouse with his own boss, Jennifer, he tries to fill two roles, as a professional manager and ‘mate’ – and he fails in both. By depicting Brent as being preoccupied with how he presents himself, the programme suggests that a good manager is authentic to himself and honest – essentially the very opposite of Brent. The ‘good’ manager is characterised by Neil, who is Brent’s rival and who becomes Brent’s boss.

The Office does indeed make clear the challenges that are faced by managers like David Brent. The staff are generally unmotivated, do not enjoy their job and are often dreaming of

escape. In episode four of the first series the characters talk about their feelings for their job.

Keith says,

“Job’s not difficult. I mean, I don’t take my work home with me, it’s pretty brainless. Ultimately, I want to play music – write music and play in a band.”

Tim says,

“The job, I’m bored with the job... I can’t take any more of this nonsense, I can’t take another boring call about Spa White Index board at two thirty a tonne”,

and Dawn says,

“I hope they get rid of me...because then I might actually get of my arse and do something. Erm, I don’t think it’s many little girls’ dream – to be a receptionist. I don’t know what I’ll do, but whatever I do, it’s got to be a career move, and not just another arbitrary job.”

Hancock (2008) points out that sitcoms like these provide settings where authority figures are shown to be hapless and where they struggle for legitimacy. Programmes like *The Office* teach about management by showing that managers struggle for legitimacy when their management style is anachronistic and/or inappropriate – they show the challenges of the workplace and how *not* to deal with them.

It was perhaps only to be expected that these elements of *The Office* would be co-opted by those who wanted their managers to be very clear about the lessons that should be drawn from it. The programme’s creators used the David Brent character in two self-referential training videos which they produced for Microsoft UK. In creating these training films, Gervais and Merchant were following in the footsteps of John Cleese, who parlayed his career as a writer and performer in Monty Python’s Flying Circus and, of course as the manic hotel manager from *Fawlty Towers*, into one as a provider of video training courses. According to the publicity material, “When John Cleese puts his name to a training video, you can be assured that people who view these Corporate Training Videos will be both entertained, and better educated.” So perhaps David Brent himself was moving in the right direction when he stated that one of his roles in the office is to be an entertainer: “I suppose I’ve created an atmosphere where I’m a friend first, boss second, and probably an entertainer third” (*The Office*, Ii).

By depicting Brent as being preoccupied with how he presents himself, the programme suggests that a good manager is authentic to himself and honest – essentially the very opposite of Brent. The ‘good’ manager is characterised by Neil, who is Brent’s rival and who becomes Brent’s boss, and the conclusions are obvious – if you are a boss, be like Neil; and if you are not a boss, you should want your boss to be like Neil.

It is important to be aware that watching television programmes not only tells those who are in a supervisory position what they should and should not be doing – it also shows their workers what they should and should not expect from their boss. Expectations about management styles and techniques apply to all of an organisation’s members, not just those with some hierarchy based power.

The focus of this paper is on management styles and techniques, but to indicate that fundamental issues of the changing nature of the workplace can be traced through television police series I now wish to point very briefly to two very important subjects: gender and race. *Cagney & Lacey* ran on CBS from 1981 to 1986, i.e. around the time when equality in the workplace for women was starting to become a major issue. It was the first crime series whose main characters were women; one was a single career minded woman, while the other was a single mother. This added an extra dimension to the programme, as their boss now had to take non-work related issues into account when making decisions – the job no longer stood alone and uncontested among factors to be considered when taking decisions. There have been several other series featuring women as the main character, like the British series *The Gentle Touch* (1980-1984), *Juliet Bravo* (1980-1985), *Prime Suspect* (1991-2006) and *Scott & Bailey* (2011-present). In them, it is no longer unusual for a woman to be the boss. Similarly, it is now no longer unusual to see a person of colour in a position of authority. Far from the casual racism of *The Sweeney* and its parody in *Life on Mars*, series like *Luther* (2010-present) and *The Wire* show that it is now no longer unusual to have someone from an ethnic minority as the person in charge.

Concluding Comments

Mazza and Alvarez (2000: 567) wrote,

“The role of the popular press has gone beyond the mere diffusion and account of prefabricated ideas to the co-production and legitimation of management practices and theories.”

The same may be said about television programmes – they grant legitimacy to management ideas by helping to construct a discourse that privileges those techniques and styles that are appropriate for a particular stage in the development of capitalism. Modern organisational processes often revolve around teams, and I showed how team work is a form of organising that is shown positively in police drama series. The trend towards systems thinking in management is exemplified in how situation comedies make a manager who is bureaucratic and not open into a figure of ridicule.

One of the themes of the conference is bridging continents. The export of US and (to a lesser extent) British television programmes to countries all around the world is a mechanism through which Anglo-Saxon management styles start to form part of the discourse about what management is in these other countries. Debray (2013: 34) talks about the global business school:

“The West guarantees and shapes the formation of international elites through its universities, business schools [...] and major corporations. No empire has ever ruled by force alone [...] It needs relays among native ruling circles, and this centrifugal incubator produces a global class of managers who incorporate its language, its references and revulsions, its organizational models (rule of law and ‘good governance’) and economic norms (Washington Consensus).”

The management styles and techniques that are depicted and seen in television programmes like those that have been discussed in this paper form a vital component in the westernisation of the world’s economies. Managers in countries around the world are made aware just by watching television of what the (Anglo-American) West thinks a good manager should be like, and more importantly, what management techniques they should be using.

The channels through which management knowledge and practices are disseminated include television programmes and films that are made (for money, of course) to entertain the audience. Most writing on management and popular culture, or organisation and popular

culture, has looked at how cultural artefacts can be used in teaching. It is important to pay more attention to what determines the form and content of the products of popular culture, and to how these aspects are decoded by the consumer of popular culture and what that means for this consumer's identity and understanding of the world of work. Popular art is part of everyday life, just as work is, so it is clearly necessary to pay more attention to the ways in which they relate to each other, and what the relevant mechanisms and processes are, than has so far been the case in the field of organisational studies.

Much work needs to be done. In this paper I have not looked in detail at, for example, the features that make it easier for a television viewer to identify with a character; nor have I gone beyond a high-level application of the circuits of culture model. Nevertheless, this article has provided evidence about how various management theories and practices have been mediated through the products of the mass culture industry and has shown how the content of programmes has varied over time to reflect the most current theories. One way in which a manager or supervisor knows how to manage or supervise people – even if they have never taken a business course in their life – is because they have watched television or been to the cinema. It is managerial common sense that today one should not manage like David Brent of *The Office* or Gene Hunt of *Life on Mars* and that one should manage knowledge workers like Gil Grissom of *CSI* or Inspector Gold of *The Bill*. Theories of management are present in comedies, dramas and thrillers: these products of mass popular culture are as much of a management text as anything that is on the shelves of a library – and they are more up-to-date. A final example: a new practice like consultification can be observed in the crime drama *Criminal Minds* (US, 2005-present), where a typical case involves the team flying in somewhere, solving a crime that was too much for the locals and flying out again. Doesn't that sound like something the Boston Consulting Group does?

Note on Scientific Management and Film: One Family, Two Films, Different Management Practices.

Cheaper by the Dozen is a particularly helpful example for illustrating how theories and practices of management form part of the background against which the action of a film takes place. The first version of *Cheaper by the Dozen*, filmed in 1950, stars Clifton Webb as Frank Gilbreth, the well known efficiency expert. This film follows the book (Gilbreth and Gilbreth, 1948) about Gilbreth (with the same title as the film and written by two of his children) quite closely and shows Gilbreth as an efficiency expert who uses his time-and-motion techniques

to run the household. For example, he calls his children to a meeting and measures how long it takes them to assemble. He comments, “18 seconds, not bad, not bad. But I still think we can make it in less.” As Lee (2002) shows, Gilbreth’s efficiency methods are at the heart of the film, and he runs his family as one might run a factory – efficiency is everything. This was not the case in the second version which was released in 1996. Steve Martin plays Frank Gilbreth, but his job has changed: he is now the coach of a American college football team, and the main plot of the film involves him accepting a position as coach of a more important college team, regretting the decision and moving back to his home town. Control of the family, which was a central issue in the first film, is of slightly less importance in this second version. Even so, there are significant differences in the way Gilbreth deals with his twelve children and in the role he adopts as *soi disant* head of the family. Whereas Gilbreth in the book and in the 1953 film uses some of his own techniques to manage his family, none of this is evident in the 1996 version. As played by Steve Martin, Gilbreth involves his children more in decision making, and is not shown to impose his own techniques for performing any tasks. Instead, he manages his children by providing a framework within which they have *some* freedom for action.

Each version of *Cheaper by the Dozen* depicts the model of management that was widely used at the time the film was made. In the early 1950s scientific management was still popular, which in the 1990s ‘softer’ forms of management had taken its place. The first version of the film (and the book) shows Gilbreth running his family using the techniques of scientific management. Importantly, this model of management is shown in a quite uncritical light; very little effort is made to poke fun at the way Gilbreth runs his family. On the other hand, these techniques are conspicuous by their absence from the second version of the film, and the model of management that is on display is one which is much less directive and which emphasises teamwork. In the second version, there is much more scope for women (as exemplified by the character of Mrs Gilbreth) to play a role in the organisation of the family.

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