

Sense and Sensibility
- To exist beyond management theory

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Abstract

Management theory does not apprehend as desirous, appealing, and less of all, emancipating by several of those who engage in it - i.e. mostly academic students which often do not teach or are doing research in the area themselves. On the whole, can management theory be made more lifelike? Can management theory be raised from the dead? What would that demand? This paper discusses, with the help of critical management theory and an existential aesthetic dimension, a more complicated picture of the individual than what is common in management literature. The human behaviour includes a feature of unpredictable spontaneity. Some kind of intuitive sense. This tendency to a rebellion of mind makes the absolute adjustment or surrender impossible. In the human correspondence to the organisation, the own integrity and the psychological uprising play an important part. The organisation and the human will never flow into each other entirely. Our attitude towards the organisation is and remains problematic.

Keywords: Management theory ▪ Conversation Piece ▪ Existential Aesthetics
▪ Critical Management Studies ▪ Rebellion of the Mind
▪ Sophia of Humankind ▪ Historical heritage ▪ Organization theory

"Dead Theorists Society"

Management theory is the child of the modern industrialism; a product of the era of mass production. Management theory is a lasting from the time when large conglomerates evolved on the historical scene in the capitalistic countries. Portal persons like Frederick W. Taylor, Henri Fayol and others, will be more comprehensible and logical if we consider this connection. Management theory appears like a composed answer on questions, forced forward by historical and economical conditions. The industrialism is still alive like a 'phenomenon of the back of the head', a working discourse, a 'wheel in the head' like the impatient anarchist and poor school teacher Max Stirner once vivid said. The industrialism is a remaining 'thought figure', if we want to use one of Johan Asplund's (2000) expressions, which is constantly structuring even our modern-day management literature. The industrialism is, metaphorical speaking, behind the words and between the lines. In the collective back head there is a more or less sharp and mental picture of a 'paradisiacal' state where mass production is taking place; the administration of companies is an acute problem; planning and execution in the production process are separated; authoritarian values dominate in a taken for granted way; untrustworthiness-assumptions about the human being are predominant; a work place conception which sees the work place in strictly physical and spatial sense, like a boisterous 'fabric', with smoking chimneys, is appearing: an idea of time as a declaration of incapacity – with a controlling time meter – is defended; an idea of the quantified and measurable performance is standing unchallenged, etc. Maybe it is this antiquated, 'industrialistic' and in many ways flashbacking and 'closing up' character of management theories that explains a large amount of the difficulties for me to mediate them, especially in situations of education. On the whole, can management theory be made more lifelike? Can management theory be raised from the dead? What would that demand?

This paper discusses, with the help of critical management theory and an existential aesthetic dimension, a more complicated picture of the individual than what is common in management literature. What I want to do with this presentation is to problematize the 'closed up' picture of our selves as *merely* mastered by different organisations, subordinated to different fields of actions.

The Existential Context

I search for a discussion where today's organisations and the theoretical speculations around them are put into an *existential context* or are added an *existential aesthetic dimension* (Guillet de Monthoux, 1996; Strati 1999). The main essential in my fumbling search is that; *the organisations are subordinate the existence*. Jean-Paul Sartre (1971) tells us to interest us for the real people, with their work and their privations. This interest in living peoples' projects has to go really deep, has to be a *genuine* interest. With reference to Kierkegaard, Sartre (1971, p.13) tells us: 'The humans' suffering, needs, passions and distresses are obvious realities, which one cannot overpass or change with the help of knowledge.' These existential phenomenons are the obvious. Everything else subsumes or vanishes in relevance.

My existential research method is to be heuristic. The starting point is not with abstract models. They cannot replace the human beings. In other words, there is not only one single existing world to explain, one and the same there is a possible world to explore or create. It is the human self who is the base. Not as a passive object for knowledge - but as a 'practical organism who produce knowledge as a moment of his/her praxis' (Sartre, 1971, p.153). Sartre notifies us a starting point which we according to him are not allowed to break: 'One has only to add that the world is human, that the depth of the human is the world, so then that the depth comes to the world through the human.' (1971, p. 119)

All right. Does the reality let it be understood or explored? Can I 'show' what I claim? Can the approach I have started to sketch be empirical studied? What kind of empirical studies in such case? What does 'empirical studies' stand for in this case?

Manfred De Vries (1983, p. 13) leaves us with a fine quote: 'We cannot just ignore the paradoxes which evolve in humans' relations. They hold significant issues about motivation, the behaviour of individuals and organisations, the nature of decision-making and the problems of change.' De Vries considers issues which traditionally have been dealt by organisational theory. But he searches for a more *substantial*

treatment of them. We cannot *ignore the complex*, the bearer of meaning and signification. It sets light on or 'explain' different phenomenon.

My empirical study, where the 'empirical' should not be diluted or trivialised, will be of non-traditional scientific nature. The method will be heuristic, like Sartre said. It is not about any deducting hypothesis that are confirmed or rejected. This is more an uncovering and exploring adventure; more of multiplicity and complications and 'uncompleted' studies; less of apparent unequivocally.

The existential coloured approach, the methodology of the concrete, invites 'methods' which catch the human's predicament. Catch her/him *in the middle of an ongoing life project*. Catch her/him where she/he stands in her/his nudity. De Vries (1983, p. 16) expresses it like this: 'By paying attention to what superficial seen are irrational and unconscious processes, I plead for a more clinic way of analysing organisations. That lead to a more complicated, but at the same time more realistic view on the human in the organisation, compared to the mechanic and one-dimensional humans which are described by several organisational theorists and industrial psychologists.'

It has been said, for example by Friedrich Nietzsche, that all thinking is metaphorical. The metaphors or pictures both entrap and release us. The most difficult of all, is to abandon a picture that entraps us. A picture of the world keeps us often trapped in that way that it prevents us from gaining a deeper understanding of the world. How do we gain the counter pictures, the pictures which tell about 'another' world? Where does the world 'crack'? Where does the world remain as an enticing enigma?

The management theory is often 'dry' and formalistic. It does not make the heart beat quicker. It often tells confirming of the world we already knew a lot about - The world which has denied us our *depth*. Therefore the pictures are needed, or rather the counter pictures, which tells about something else: the pictures that turns into the adventure. Where everything can happen. The pictures that liberate.

To continue to imply the audience of the Organisation, where the organisation with capital O stands for the imagination or idea that the aim is the possible, rational and targeting organisation, in some way is *exonerated from its human content or where*

this is relativisticated, is – according to me – to expire to a objectivated thinking. Where the human, the concrete human, with its potential creativity, its contradiction, its wealth of imagination and magnificence, risks getting forlorn. Therefore, that picture of the Organisation has to be abandoned. Otherwise, in the long run, there is with this reasoning the risk that the human is permanented to only be ‘personnel’ or ‘organisation member’. In that case, Weber can stand up from his grave and get his prophecy confirmed. The Organisation ‘consumed’ the human. And then, we would be transferred back to the point of departure, the point of destiny. We never succeeded to open and climb out of, with Weber’s (1978, p. 86) terminology, ‘the iron cage’.

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