2

The Conduct of Management and the Management of Conduct: Contemporary Managerial Discourse and the Constitution of the 'Competent' Manager

Paul du Gay, Graeme Salaman and Bronwen Rees

Introduction

This paper aims to open up discussion about the reconceptualization of a particular category of person – the manager. It represents an initial attempt to think through certain issues surrounding the contemporary 'making up' of the manager as an active agent in his or her own government (particularly as this process is developing in the United Kingdom and United States).

While contemporary discourses of organizational reform, such as total quality management (TQM), excellence, and so forth, all allocate a crucial role to managers and management the analysis of the so-called 'new managerial work' by social scientists in general and sociologists in particular has tended to be cursory and unilluminating. […] Our concern in this paper is to focus upon one dimension of the contemporary re-conceptualization of managerial work – the turn to competency. We consider the ways in which the competence approach inherently offers a simultaneous reconstructing of the manager, and defines this reconstruction in terms of qualities that centre on the managers' own self-government and enterprise. Our analysis of the competence approach regards it as a crucial element in contemporary discourses

of organizational change which essentially locates and defines such change in terms of the required individual attributes (attitudes, behaviours) of the new manager. Within contemporary programmes of organizational change the competence approach plays a key role as a central relay mechanism mediating between structure and individual, and defining the new relationship between these – in terms of qualities managers need to operate competently within organizations that have been transformed into quasi-markets – i.e. enterprisingly. More specifically, we attempt to indicate the ways in which the images and ideals of 'management competency' are made practicable in the workplace.

■ 'Making up' managers

Our first task is to indicate what we mean by the term 'making up' managers. What might this phrase signify? Well, on the one hand, making something up suggests the construction of a fiction. But in what sense can the 'manager' be represented as a fictional character? On the other hand, the idea of being 'made up' suggests a material-cultural process of formation or transformation ('fashioning') whereby the adoption of certain habits and dispositions allows an individual to become – and to become recognized as – a particular sort of person.

What both versions of 'making up' share is a concern with 'invention'. They serve as a corrective to the tendency – associated with both radical sociological critiques of management and prescriptive managerial discourse – to regard a given activity or characteristic as in some sense 'natural'. It is perfectly possible and legitimate to conceive of the 'manager' as a fiction, for example, because that category of person has not always existed. As Pollard (1965), among many others, has indicated, the 'manager' only came into being at a particular historical juncture. Similarly, it is important to note that the dispositions, actions and attributes that constitute 'management' have no natural form, and for this reason must be approached as a series of historically specific assemblages. To be 'made up' – in the second sense of the term – as a manager is therefore to acquire that particular assemblage of attributes and dispositions which defines the activity of management at any given period.

The term 'making up' serves to highlight the way in which conceptions of persons and conceptions of activities are inextricably linked. […] In other words, particular categories of person and the criteria for their identity are defined by reference to a range of activities that are regarded as 'centrally and normatively important to a culture, a historical period or an investigative context' (Rorty, 1988, p. 6). […]

In this paper, we are concerned with investigating the contemporary emergence of the so-called 'competent' manager. In order to chart the 'making up' of this creation we begin by delineating and analysing contemporary conceptions

of organizational reform and the role they allocate to the character of the manager. Having done this we move on to examine the mechanisms – or technologies – through which these dreams and schemes are operationalized and the 'competent' manager is constituted.

Re-imagining organizational life: contemporary managerial discourse and the conduct of management

Throughout the twentieth century the 'character' of the manager has been a regular source of public concern, debate and calls for action (Child, 1969). Indeed, the government of economic life across the present century has entailed a range of attempts to shape and regulate the conduct of management. From 'scientific management' through 'human relations' up to and including contemporary programmes of organizational reform such as total quality management and human resource management, the activities of individuals as managers have become an object of knowledge and the target of expertise. A complex series of links has been established through which the economic priorities of politicians and business persons have been articulated in terms of the required personal characteristics of managers (du Gay, 1991; Miller and Rose, 1990). […] The relationship between these two seemingly discrete elements – representations and material practices – can be understood by reference to the concept of 'discourse'. For our purposes, a discourse refers to a group of statements that provides a language for talking about a topic and a way of producing a particular kind of knowledge about the topic. Thus, 'discourse' serves to undermine conventional distinctions between 'thought' and 'action', 'language' and 'practice'. The term refers both to the production of knowledge through language and representation and the way that knowledge is institutionalized, shaping social practices and cultural technologies and setting new practices and technologies into play. Therefore, it is possible to say that management discourses 'make up' particular ways for the activity of management to be conceptualized and performed.

In recent years the character of the manager has once again become a focus of considerable (national) concern. A number of reports […] stressed that British companies were in danger of losing out to foreign competitors in many markets because their 'stock' of managers were not adequately trained and developed in the appropriate skills and techniques necessary to meet the challenges posed by a rapidly changing organizational landscape (Barham et al., 1988; Constable and McCormick, 1987; Handy, 1987; Mangham and Silver, 1986). In order to guarantee its position and to ensure future economic growth and success it was deemed crucial that 'Britain … do more to develop her managers and do it more systematically' (Handy, 1987, p. 15).

[…]

The representations of organization and management deployed within these reports share a common language and mode of problematization with the dominant discourses of organizational reform […]. The discourses of human resource management, total quality management, and excellence, to name but some of the most well known, all placed emphasis upon the development of more 'organic', 'flexible' organizational forms and practices which would overcome the perceived stasis, rigidity and inefficiency of more 'bureaucratic' structures and practices (Hill, 1991; Peters, 1987, 1992; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Storey, 1989). In particular, they indicated that organizational transformation would necessitate the production of new norms of organizational and personal conduct and the creation of a 'common corporate culture'.

The norms and values characterizing the conduct of 'excellent' organizations, for example, were articulated in explicit opposition to those deemed to constitute the identity of bureaucratic enterprises. Whereas, it was argued, bureaucratic organization encouraged the development of particular capacities and predispositions among its subjects – strict adherence to procedure, the abnegation of personal moral enthusiasms and so forth – the discourse of 'excellence' stressed the importance of individuals acquiring and exhibiting more 'market oriented', 'proactive', 'empowered' and 'entrepreneurial' attitudes and capacities. 'Bureaucratic culture', it was argued, had to give way to 'new approaches that require people to exercise discretion, take initiative, and assume a much greater responsibility for their own organization and management' (Morgan, 1988, p. 56). […]

Within these discourses, it is individual managers who are charged with the task of ensuring that these novel work-based subjects emerge. Managers were represented as having a pivotal role in securing successful organizational change through fostering certain 'entrepreneurial' virtues, first within themselves and then among their subordinates. Thus, in opposition to the 'personally detached and strictly objective expert' deemed to characterize bureaucratic management the 'excellent' manager was represented as a 'charismatic' facilitator, teaching others to learn how to take responsibility for themselves and fostering an 'enterprising' sense of identification, commitment and involvement between employees and the organization for which they worked.

[…]

◼ Entrepreneurial governance and personal conduct

Enterprise and entrepreneurialism occupy an absolutely crucial role in contemporary discourses of organizational reform where the major principle of

organizational restructuring is the attempt to introduce market mechanisms, market relationships and market attitudes within the organization. Furthermore, enterprise is, naturally, a necessary and valued quality in a market-dominated system. Thus, 'enterprise' is deployed both as a critique of 'bureaucratic' organizational governance and as a solution to the problems posed by 'globalization' through delineating the principles of a novel method of governing organizational and personal conduct.

But what exactly are the basic principles of 'enterprise' as a rationality of government and how do 'entrepreneurial principles' re-define the conduct of organizational life? Quite obviously, an important feature of entrepreneurial government is the role it accords to the 'enterprise form' as the preferred model for any form of institutional organization and provision of goods and services (Keat, 1990, p. 3; see also Gospel, 1992). However, of equal importance is the way in which the term 'enterprise' also refers to those activities that express and display enterprising qualities. Here 'enterprise' refers to a bundle of characteristics such as initiative, self-reliance and the ability to accept responsibility for oneself and one's actions.

Thus, as Graham Burchell (1993) notes, the defining characteristic of entrepreneurial governance is the 'generalization of an "enterprise form" to all forms of conduct – to the conduct of organizations hitherto seen as being neo-economic, to the conduct of government, and to the conduct of individuals themselves'. […]

As Burchell (1993, p. 276) has argued, a characteristic feature of this style of government is the crucial role it accords to 'contract' in re-defining social relations. The changes affecting schools, hospitals, government departments and so forth often involve the re-constituting of institutional roles in terms of *contracts strictly defined*, and even more frequently involve a *contract-like way* of representing relationships between institutions and between individuals and institutions. […]

Thus, 'contractualization' typically consists in assigning the performance of a function or an activity to a distinct unit of management – individual or collective – which is regarded as being accountable for the efficient performance of that function or conduct of that activity. By assuming active responsibility for these activities and functions – both for carrying them out and for their outcomes – these units of management are in effect affirming a certain kind of identity or personality. This identity or personality is essentially entrepreneurial in character.

[…]

As Colin Gordon (1991, pp. 42–5), for example, has argued, entrepreneurial forms of governance such as contractualization involve the re-imagination of the social as a form of the economic. 'This operation works', he argues, 'by the progressive enlargement of the territory of economic theory by a series of redefinitions of its object.'

> Economics thus becomes an 'approach' capable in principle of addressing
> the totality of human behaviour, and, consequently, of envisaging a coherent
> economic method of programming the totality of governmental action.
> (Gordon, 1991, p. 43) [...]

[...]

[...] The subject of 'enterprise' is both a 'reactivation and a radical inversion' of traditional 'economic man'. The reactivation consists 'in positing a fundamental human faculty of *choice*, a principle which empowers economic calculation effectively to sweep aside the anthropological categories and frameworks of the human and social sciences'. The great innovation occurs, however, in the conceptualization of the economic agent as an inherently manipulable creation. Whereas, *homo economicus* was originally conceived of as a subject the well-springs of whose activity were ultimately 'untouchable by government', the subject of enterprise is imagined as an agent 'who is perpetually responsive to modifications in its environment'. As Gordon (1991, p. 43) points out, 'economic government here joins hands with behaviourism'. The resultant subject is in a novel sense not just an 'enterprise' but 'the entrepreneur of himself or herself'. In other words, entrepreneurial government 'makes up' the individual as a particular sort of person – as an 'entrepreneur of the self' (Gordon, 1987, p. 300).

This idea of an individual human life as 'an enterprise of the self' suggests that no matter what hand circumstance may have dealt a person, he or she remains always continuously engaged (even if technically 'unemployed') in that one enterprise, and that it is 'part of the continuous business of living to make adequate provision for the preservation, reproduction and reconstruction of one's own human capital' (Gordon, 1991, p. 44).

Because a human being is considered to be continuously engaged in a project to shape his or her life as an autonomous, choosing individual driven by the desire to optimize the worth of its own existence, life for that person is represented as a single, basically undifferentiated arena for the pursuit of that endeavour. [...]

This conception of the individual as an 'entrepreneur of the self' is firmly established at the heart of contemporary programmes of organizational reform (consider for example recent emphasis on managers 'managing their own careers'). In keeping with the entrepreneurial imbrication of economics and behaviourism contemporary programmes of organizational reform characterize employment not as a painful obligation imposed upon individuals, nor as an activity undertaken to meet purely instrumental needs, but rather as a means to self-development. Organizational success is therefore premised upon an engagement by the organization of the self-optimizing impulses of all its members, no matter what their formal role. This ambition is to be made practicable in the workplace through a variety of organizational restructuring

techniques such as flattening hierarchies and performance-related pay. The latter, for example, whose deployment throughout the public sector has grown dramatically in the last decade, often involves the development of an on-going 'contract' between an individual employee and their line manager whereby an employee's pay is made more dependent upon whether s/he has met or exceeded certain performance objectives (Millward et al., 1992, pp. 268 and 361; Marsden and Richardson, 1994).

The redefinition of management consists of major shift in the 'contract' between employer and manager: the traditional exchange – of security, long-term tenure in return for compliance and loyalty – has been replaced by a market-centred relationship where the contract is defined by the employer, in terms of a constant, regular and continuous assessment, and therefore possible renewal/termination, of the employment relationship, based on measures of performance. The relationship is now based on the value of the discrete transactions, and its permanence and security are functions of the employee's demonstrated 'added value'.

This redefinition necessarily emphasizes new managerial skills/competencies – competencies necessitated by the newly empowered roles of managers and their staff where they are required to 'own' and to be accountable for their own performance and that of others.

[…]

The redefinition of management not only emphasizes and articulates the skills/competencies managers will need in order to act effectively in their newly empowered and accountable roles, but also reflects the delegation of responsibility to ensure achievement/possession of these competencies, to the managers themselves. The price of this involvement is that individuals themselves must assume responsibility for carrying out these activities and for their outcomes. In keeping with the constitutive principles of enterprise as a rationality of government, performance management and related techniques function as forms of 'responsibilization', which are held to be both economically desirable and personally 'empowering'.

Entrepreneurial organizational governance therefore involves the reconstruction of a wide range of institutions, activities, relationships and staff along the lines of the market. At the same time, guaranteeing that the optimum benefits accrue from the re-structuring of organizations along market lines necessitates the production of particular forms of conduct by all members of an organization. In this sense, governing organizational life in an enterprising manner involves 'making up' new ways for people to be; it refers to the importance of individuals acquiring and exhibiting specific 'enterprising' capacities and dispositions.

Contemporary organizational success is therefore premised upon an engagement by the organization of the 'enterprising capacities' of individuals as subjects. In other words, individuals are to be brought to identify themselves with the goals and objectives of their employing organization to the

extent that they interpret them as both dependent upon and enhancing their own skills of self-development, self-direction and self-management. In this way, 'enterprise' plays the role of relay between objectives that are economically desirable and those that are personally seductive, 'teaching the arts of self-realization that will enhance employees as individuals' as well as managers or workers (Rose, 1989, p. 16). This responsibilization of the self, the instilling of a reflexive self-monitoring which will afford self-understanding and self-control, makes paid employment an essential element in the path to self-fulfilment and provides the a priori that links work and non-work together, blurring the boundaries between what is properly inside and what is properly outside the orbit of the organization (Sabel, 1991).

Although both managers and workers are represented as equally amenable to 'entrepreneurial' reconstitution, the former are held to have a particularly important role in securing organizational change through fostering 'enterprise' among the latter (Hill, 1991). […] Managers are charged with 'leading' their subordinates to 'self-realization' by encouraging them to make a project of themselves, to work on their relations with employment and on all other aspects of their lives in order to develop a style of life and relationship to self that will maximize the worth of their existence to themselves.

> No more close supervision of workers, no more focus on data irrelevant to running the business, no more energy spent on defending turf. The role of managers becomes one of empowerment – providing workers with the information, training, authority and accountability to excel … As workers take on more management tasks, managers must take on more leadership tasks – holding a vision of the business, articulating it to workers and customers, and creating an environment that truly empowers workers. (Champy, 1994)

In other words, managers are charged with reconstructing the conduct and self-image of employees: with encouraging them to acquire the capacities and dispositions that will enable them to become 'enterprising' persons. The current interest in identifying and allocating key management 'competences' is seen as fundamental to this process.

Constructing the competent manager

As we have indicated, proponents of contemporary organizational discourse are adamant that the re-imagined corporation depends for its success upon the pre-dispositions and capacities of its managers. This assumption is also a constitutive feature of the reports into the 'state' of British management mentioned earlier. As Mangham and Silver (1986, p. 2), for example, argue, 'to a large extent … it is the competency of managers that will influence the return that an organization will secure from its investment in both human

and material capital'. There are two elements to this focus upon the character of the 'competent' manager.

First, the *role* of management is greatly enhanced – even if the *number* of managers is reduced – in the 'flexible' corporation. As the marker of formal hierarchy and the clear distinctions of task, title and function is problematized managers are allocated *the* major responsibility for ensuring that their 'empowered' subordinates adopt the appropriate 'entrepreneurial' habits of action deemed necessary for organizational success.

Secondly, this enhanced role for the manager also necessitates the adoption of *new managerial attributes, skills and capacities*. Managers […] are 'imagined' very differently from their predecessors because the conception of what their job entails is itself re-classified.

If contemporary discourses of organizational reform construct a particular way of representing and acting upon the character of the manager – one that differs very substantially from previous constructions – through what mechanisms does this new manager emerge? […]

According to Michel Foucault (1986, pp. 225–6) attempts to instrumentalize and operationalize particular rationalities of government take a *technological* form. To investigate the 'making up' of the manager as an active agent in her or his own government therefore necessitates an examination of the seemingly banal mechanisms which make this form of government a practical possibility – 'techniques of notation, computation and calculation; procedures of examination and assessment … the standardization of systems for training and the inculcation of habits' (Miller and Rose, 1990, p. 8).

One of the key mechanisms through which authorities of various sorts have sought to shape, normalize and instrumentalize the conduct of management – to 'make up' the new manager – has been the development of management *competences* (Boam and Sparrow, 1992a; Boyatzis, 1982; MCI, 1991).

The turn to competency

The term 'competence' has proliferated in management theory and practice over the past decade. There are three distinct approaches of which the behavioural focus that we discuss here is just one. A second is the strategic concept of core competences, which focuses more on a specific articulation between product, processes and human resource capability and was first identified by Prahalad and Hamel (1989). The third is that developed by the Management Charter Initiative (MCI), which focuses on minimum standards of functional performance.

The behavioural model of competence has its origins in the research of the McBer Consultancy in the late 1970s in the USA as part of the initiative by the American Management Association to identify the characteristics that distinguish superior from average managerial performance (Iles, 1992). The

work was encapsulated in the seminal book *The Competent Manager* (Boyatzis, 1982). At its heart, the initiative turns around the processes by which a relevant 'fit' is achieved between the individual and the role holder. Attempting to identify relevant qualities in existing managerial staff and in potential management recruits between 'person' and 'job' is a staple element of personnel practice.

[…]

[…] The 'competence principle' can be used simply as a means of identifying training and development needs, or at the other end of the scale, it can be used as a tool for the wholesale change of an organizational structure and the individuals within it. Further, there is still considerable debate around the actual meaning of the team 'competence'. At various times it has been defined as knowledge, skill, ability, or behaviour.

Despite these multiple and often conflicting accounts of what the word 'competency' means it is generally agreed that all competency systems are based upon explicit behavioural or outcome-based statements. In other words, they focus on *actual performance*. At the same time, they are also all based upon research with *role-holders*. That is, specific competencies are identified through research with the people who are actually involved in doing specific sorts of work.

According to Woodruffe (1992, p. 17), for example,

> a competency is a dimension of overt, manifest behaviour that allows a person to perform competently. Behind it must be both the ability and desire to behave in that competent way. For example, the person competent at selling will need a competency that includes listening. In turn that includes knowing how to listen and choosing to listen. Put more generally, people will only produce competent action in a situation if they know how to and if they value the consequences of the expected outcomes of the action.

The lists of competences produced by academics, practitioners or consultants, whether they be generically or organizationally derived, focus on 'how' to carry out the job – and generally tend to express the capacities, dispositions and attributes of the managers outlined by Peters, Kanter et al., as being crucial to the emergence of the enterprising manager. For example, the eleven competences elicited by Schroder (1989) for high performers carry many of Peters' requirements: information search; concept formation; conceptual flexibility; interpersonal search; managing interaction; development orientation; self-confidence; presentation impact; proactive orientation; achievement orientation.

In other words, 'competency' refers to certain characteristics that a person exhibits which results in effective job performance (Woodruff, 1992). These characteristics are regarded as generic, though they do receive different emphasis depending, for example, on management level or on the sector within which

the organization in question is located – i.e. public or private (Boyatzis, 1982). Even if there is variation and debate in the actual competences used, one clear commonality emerges: and that is the agreement that 'competence' can and should be measured. This we see as the technological form of attempts to instrumentalize and operationalize particular rationalities of government. The notion of the competence is seen as the future way of capturing the most elusive of resources – the human one.

The competency approach

The aim of the competency approach is to provide an integrated system whereby those generic characteristics (whether they be generic to the organization or management in general) that distinguish competent managerial performance are identified, then existing and required levels of competency are assessed through appraisal and, finally, any resultant gaps are addressed through on-going assessment and training and development programmes.

There are two distinct stages in the competency approach: in the first stage competencies are identified; and the second focuses on the extent, and way in which the competence framework is implemented in the organization. For each stage there is a raft of mechanisms by which the individual within an organization can develop him or herself in order to realize their own human potential.

The first element of this competency system – the identification of competencies – involves the deployment of a range of job analysis methods derived from person-oriented approaches such as critical incident technique, repertory grid analysis and behavioural event interviews (Kandola and Pearn, 1992).

Once the competencies have been identified, implementation can be designed. The range of mechanisms and technologies used to engender this implementation will vary depending on the extent to which competences are being used as organization-wide development or purely as a tool for management development.

The size of such a task is not to be underestimated. As Lawler points out:

> In existing organizations, the entire human resource management
> infrastructure needs to be altered or replaced. This is clearly a large task and
> may be resisted by the many employees who are comfortable with traditional
> job descriptions, job-based pay and the bureaucratic approach to management.
> Indeed, many of them may not have the capability of functioning effectively
> in organization that emphasizes the skill-based approach. (Lawler, 1994)

Pivotal to this architecture is the notion of assessment. As the need to make the organization 'competent' is acknowledged, so ever more technologies are introduced to measure this competence. At the outset, when competencies

are first identified a 'competency audit' may be held to delineate and assess current managerial competency levels. Assessment centre technologies may well form the backbone of such an audit. Here competences are assessed at one large event instead of sporadically over a longer period of time.

As an on-going feature of competence, appraisal is a key mechanism for ensuring that individuals behave in a way that is appropriate to the overall business plan and culture of the organization. Many organizations will have workshops built into their competency programmes so that managers are trained in appraising both themselves and their subordinates. There has also been growing use of 360 degree feedback, or upward appraisal (Fletcher, 1993; Moravec et al., 1993; Novack, 1993). In this process, feedback is collected 'all around' an employee, from his or her supervisors, subordinates, peers, and even the customer. It provides a comprehensive summary of an employee's skills, abilities, styles and job-related competencies. Indeed the individual actually 'becomes' the manager of his/her own performance.

■ Enterprising up the competency approach

The attractions of the competency approach to various economic authorities are obvious. In indicating that it is possible to define exactly what is needed in managerial jobs in an organization and precisely what people need to bring to those jobs in order to perform them effectively the expertise of competency offers the promise of improved managerial performance and, as a result, continuous business success.

However, the expertise of competency doesn't simply promise to improve organizational performance, it also offers individual managers the prospect of self-improvement. Indeed, becoming a competent manager is equated with becoming a better, more autonomous, accountable self. And with owning the qualities necessary to take responsibility not only for empowered managerial roles, but for empowered staff, and for their development and improvement: 'adding value' to the corporation, oneself and one's staff. As we indicated earlier, within the new discourses of organizational reform the values of self-management, self-presentation and self-realization are represented as both personally seductive and economically desirable. The competency approach, it is argued, can instrumentalize these values by enabling managers to see 'how' exactly they demonstrate competency in their jobs and by offering them the chance to help themselves become more competent as managers and as individuals in the future (Boam and Sparrow, 1992b, p. xxi).

Thus the competency approach promises to make practicable the dreams and schemes of contemporary discourses of organizational reform. That this promise is taken seriously is evidenced by the growing number of major UK companies – including Cadbury Schweppes, W.H. Smith, British Petroleum, National & Provincial Building Society, Rank Xerox, National Power, and the

Body Shop – which have deployed the competency approach to redefine the role and practice of management in their organizations.

However, as more organizations have taken the competency route, so the approach itself has come in for considerable criticism as hoped-for outcomes have proved elusive or actual changes are adjudged to have been only partially successful (Cockerill, 1989; Sparrow and Boam, 1992).

[…]

The 'failures' associated with the operationalization of competency technologies have not led to their abandonment, but rather to their elaboration and 'refinement'. In other words, while competency technologies have rarely been ajudged to have delivered their promise, this has not signalled the downfall of the approach as a whole. Failures have simply been represented as challenges which the 'development of the methodology' *in line with the values of contemporary organizational discourse* will meet.

Proponents of contemporary organizational discourse continually point to the dramatically altered substance of managerial practice. According to Kanter (1989, p. 85), for example, 'managerial work is undergoing such enormous rapid change that many managers are re-inventing their profession as they go: with little precedent to guide them, they are watching hierarchy fade away and the clear distinctions of title, task, department, even corporation blur'. In the flexible meta-corporation (Sabel, 1991), managers are therefore more dependent upon their own resources. This in turn entails 'more risk and uncertainty … No longer counting on the corporation requires people to build resources in themselves' (Kanter, 1989, pp. 357–8). The assumption is that 'managers are more personally exposed' as 'reliance on organizations to give shape to a career is being replaced by a reliance on self' (Kanter, 1991, p. 76).

Thus, the substance of the managerial job is altered with 'soft' personal and interpersonal management skills coming to the fore while the more mechanical and administrative elements of (bureaucratic) managerial tasks begin to take a back seat or disappear completely. The success of the organization is therefore increasingly premised upon managers' abilities to foster 'proactive mindsets', 'entrepreneurship', 'self-development' and other 'virtues', first within themselves and then among their subordinates (Morgan, 1988).

This concern with individual 'inner' resources and personal and interpersonal management capacities is another area in which existing competency approaches have come in for criticism. According to Iles and Salaman (1994), for example, many competency models have been criticized for paying insufficient attention to the skills of creativity, sensitivity, imagination and so forth which are increasingly seen to be crucial to the successful conduct of the 'new managerial work'. These so-called 'soft competences' are assumed to be 'difficult to measure under any circumstances and virtually impossible to measure under simulated conditions' (Jacobs, 1989). The inability to technologize these capacities and dispositions, it is argued, undermines the efficacy of the competency approach.

Once again, however, criticism has not led to the abandonment of the competency approach; rather, it has acted as a spur to the production of competency mechanisms that can identify and validate behaviourally observable 'soft' skills. […]

▌ **Concluding remarks – mobilizing managers**

In this paper we have sought to open up discussion about the reconceptualization of the character of the manager. More specifically we have attempted to indicate the ways in which new images and ideals of management are made practicable in the workplace.

As Hill (1991, p. 398), for example, has indicated, while contemporary discourses of organizational reform allocate a crucial role to managers, the analysis of the 'new managerial work' by social scientists in general and sociologists in particular has tended to be cursory and unilluminating. […]

Our concern here has been to take the matter of managerial organization seriously by delineating and examining one component of the contemporary making up of the manager as an active agent in his or her own government: the turn to competency.

It is possible to detect a general consistency in the style of government advocated by contemporary discourses of organizational reform. The essential characteristic of this style of government is the generalization of an 'enterprise form' to all forms of conduct – personal as well as organizational: the promotion of an enterprise culture. This does not mean simply that all desired forms of organizational behaviour will be overtly enterprising; although many will be. It also means that new desired forms of behaviour will reflect the reconstruction of the employee and particularly the manager, in terms of those behaviours/competencies that are required by roles where incumbents are answerable, as it were, for themselves, answerable and accountable for their own demonstrable added value, required to demonstrate their competence within an organization and an employment relationship that being imbued with market principles requires market characteristics. Furthermore, the competent employee and the competent manager must take personal responsibility for demonstrating these required behaviours – for self-marketing. Within these discourses continuous business improvement is premised upon an engagement by the organization of the 'enterprising capacities' of individuals as subjects. In other words, contemporary forms of organizational government encourage their subjects to adopt an entrepreneurial form of practical relationship to themselves as a condition of their effectiveness and of the effectiveness of this form of government. This involves offering individuals – most especially managers, but also workers – involvement in activities previously held to be the responsibility of other, clearly demarcated functions and groups – human resource, finance or contract managers, for example. However,

the price of this involvement is that they must assume active responsibility for these activities, both for carrying them out and for their outcomes 'and in so doing they are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the appropriate (or approved) model of action' (Burchell, 1993, p. 276).

A crucial component of contemporary organizational governance is therefore the way in which it relies for its effectivity upon individuals assuming the status of being the subjects of their own existence, upon the ways in which they fashion themselves as certain sorts of person. In other words, contemporary forms of organizational government are premised upon the mobilization of the subjectivity of managers.

This mobilization is effected or instrumentalized technologically. It is made practicable within an organizational context through a range of banal mechanisms which can include, *inter alia*, performance appraisal techniques (Townley, 1989, 1993) novel calculative technologies such as activity-based accounting (Miller and O'Leary, 1993, 1994) and emotion and interpersonal management techniques such as transaction analysis (du Gay, 1996).

Competency systems are but one component, albeit an important one, in the ensemble of activities that 'make up' the manager as an enterprising subject. Furthermore, this process of 'making up' is always contingent and provisional. As we have shown, the institution of novel enterprising technologies is never the cut and dried affair that some management gurus would suggest. Rather than being inscribed upon a *tabula rasa*, enterprising technologies of government emerge within organizations where the structuring of work relations, for example, already involves the fracturing of collections of managers and workers around which 'friend-enemy' groupings have developed (Salaman, 1985).

As such the enterprising self is unlikely to be or to become the sole or exclusive model for forms of work-based identification. The degree to which technologies of enterprise meet with resistance and the forms and effects this resistance takes are, of course, matters for empirical investigation. However, while it may be the case that when the enterprising self is brought into an organization it comes into contact with continuing forms of solidarity and exclusion, this does not erase the significance of its emergence. In other words, the possibility of subverting entrepreneurial norms does not automatically erase their significance as regulatory mechanisms in the lives of individuals.

That individual managers are able to use a range of governmental technologies for their own ends to further their own objectives is not an indication of the failure of such mechanisms. Entrepreneurial norms and techniques of conduct are not necessarily displaced by such activity. As Miller (1992, p. 75) has suggested, they still remain as something to which appeals can be made; they continue to provide the terms in which individuals are judged and judge themselves and as something in the name of which business opportunities can be compared and decisions made. Our discussion of the difficulties

of operationalizing competences supports just such a reading. Putting competency systems to work in organizations is never a trouble-free process. None the less, while 'live' competency systems are subject to considerable criticism this does not mean they have 'failed' in some absolute, zero sum sense. As we have indicated, governmental technologies are typically surrounded by systematic attempts to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. 'Failure' in this sense is an integral component of the working of these technologies. It represents a challenge which the 'development of the methodology' in line with particular values and ideals – in this case the norms of enterprise – is expected to meet.

Note

References

Barham, K. et al. (1988) *Management for the Future*. Berkhamstead and London: Ashridge Management College and Foundation for Management Education.

Boam, R. and Sparrow, P. (1992a) 'The rise and rationale of competency-based approaches'. In Boam, R. and Sparrow, P. (eds), *Designing and Achieving Competency*. London: McGraw-Hill, 3–15.

Boam, R. and Sparrow, P. (eds) (1992b) *Designing and Achieving Competency*. London: McGraw-Hill.

Boyatzis, R. (1982) *The Competent Manager*. New York: Wiley.

Burchell, G. (1993) 'Liberal government and techniques of the self'. *Economy and Society*, 22: 267–82.

Champy, J. (1994) 'Time to re-engineer the manager'. *Financial Times*, 14 January, 17.

Child, J. (1969) *British Management Thought*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Cockerill, T. (1989) 'The kind of competence for rapid change'. *Personnel Management*, 21, 9: 52–6.

Constable, J. and McCormick, R. (1987) *The Making of British Managers*. London: BIM/CBI.

Fletcher, C. (1993) 'Appraisal: an idea whose time has come?'. *Personnel Management*, September.

Fletcher, S. (1992) *Competence-Based Assessment Techniques*. London: Kogan Page.

Foucault, M. (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock.

Foucault, M. (1986) 'Space, knowledge and power'. In Rabinow, P. (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

du Gay, P. (1991) 'Enterprise culture and the ideology of excellence'. *New Formations*, 13.

du Gay, P. (1996) *Consumption and Identity at Work*. London: Sage.

Gordon, C. (1987) 'The soul of the citizen: Max Weber and Michel Foucault on rationality and government'. In Whimster, S. and Lash, S. (eds), *Max Weber: Rationality and Modernity*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Gordon, C. (1991) 'Governmental rationality: an introduction'. In Burchell, G. et al. (eds), *The Foucault Effect*. Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Gospel, H. (1992) *Markets, Firms, and the Management of Labour in Modern Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Handy, C. (1987) *The Making of Managers*. London: MSC.

Hill, S. (1991) 'How do you manage a flexible firm? The total quality model'. *Work, Employment and Society*, 5, 3: 397–416.

Iles, P. (1992) 'Managing assessment and selection processes'. Block 4, B884 *Human Resource Strategies*. Milton Keynes: Open University.

Iles, P. and Salaman, G. (1994) 'Recruitment and selection'. In Storey, J. (ed.), *Human Resource Management: A Critical Text*. London: Routledge.

Jacobs, R. (1989) 'Getting the measure of management competence'. *Personnel Management*, June, 32–7.

Kandola, R. and Pearn, M. (1992) 'Identifying competencies'. In Boam, R. and Sparrow, P. (eds), *Designing and Achieving Competency*. London: McGraw-Hill, 31–50.

Kanter, R. (1989) *When Giants Learn to Dance*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Kanter, R. (1991) 'The future of bureaucracy and hierarchy in organizational theory: a report from the field'. In Bourdieu, P. and Coleman, J. (eds), *Social Theory for a Changing Society*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Keat, R. (1990) 'Introduction'. In Keat, R. and Abercrombie, N. (eds), *Enterprise Culture*. London: Routledge.

Lawler, E. (1994) 'From job-based to competency-based organizations'. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 15: 3–15.

Lyotard, J.-F. (1984) *The Postmodern Condition*. Translated by G. Bennington and G. Massumi. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

MCI (Management Charter Initiative) (1991) *Management Standards Implementation Pack*. London: MCI.

Mangham, I. and Silver, M. (1986) *Management Training: Context and Practice*. ESRC Pilot Survey on Management Training.

Marsden, D. and Richardson, R. (1994) 'Performing for pay? The effects of "merit pay" on motivation in a public service'. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 32, 2: 243–61.

Miller, P. (1992) 'Accounting and objectivity: the invention of calculating selves and calculable spaces'. *Annals of Scholarship*, 9: 61–86.

Miller, P. and O'Leary, T. (1993) 'Accounting expertise and the politics of the product: economic citizenship and modes of corporate governance'. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 18: 187–206.

Miller, P. and O'Leary, T. (1994) 'Accounting, "economic citizenship" and the spatial re-ordering of manufacturing'. *Accounting, Organizations and Society,* 19, 1: 15–43.

Miller, P. and Rose, N. (1990) 'Governing economic life'. *Economy and Society*, 19: 1–31.

Millward, N. et al. (1992) *Workplace Industrial Relations in Transition*. Aldershot: Dartmouth.

Moravec, M. et al. (1993) 'Upward feedback. A 21st century communication tool'. *HR Magazine*, July, 77–81.

Morgan, G. (1988) *Riding the Waves of Change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Novack, K. (1993) '360-degree feedback: the whole story'. *Training and Development*, January, 69–72.

Peters, T. (1987) *Thriving On Chaos*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Peters, T. (1992) *Liberation Management*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Peters, T. and Waterman, R. (1982) *In Search of Excellence*. New York: Harper & Row.

Pollard, S. (1965) *The Genesis of Modern Management*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Prahalad, C.K. and Hamel, G. (1989) 'The core competence of the corporation'. *Harvard Business Review*, 68, May/June: 79–91.

Rorty, A. (1988) *Mind In Action*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Rose, N. (1989) 'Governing the enterprising self'. Paper presented to a conference on the Values of the Enterprise Culture, Lancaster University.

Rose, N. (1990) *Governing the Soul*. London: Routledge.

Sabel, C. (1991) 'Moebius strip organizations and open labour markets: some consequences of the re-integration of conception and execution in a volatile economy'. In Bourdieu, P. and Coleman, J. (eds), *Social Theory for a Changing Society*. Boulder: West-view Press.

Salaman, G. (1985) *Working*. London: Tavistock.

Schroder, H.M. (1989) *Managerial Competence: The Key to Excellence*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt.

Sparrow, P. and Boam, R. (1992) 'Where do we go from here?'. In Boam, R. and Sparrow, P. (eds), *Designing and Achieving Competency*. London: McGraw-Hill, 175–96.

Storey, J. (ed.) (1989) *New Perspectives on Human Resource Management*. London: Routledge.

Townley, B. (1989) 'Selection and appraisal: reconstituting "social relations"?'. In Storey, J. (ed.), *New Perspectives on Human Resource Management*. London: Routledge, 92–108.

Townley, B. (1993) 'Performance appraisal and the emergence of management'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 30: 221–38.

Woodruffe, C. (1992) 'What is meant by a competency'. In Boam, R. and Sparrow, P. (eds), *Designing and Achieving Competency*. London: McGraw-Hill, 16–30.