

Management Articles of the Year

June 2012



With a foreword by Sir Paul Judge



In association with



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Foreword



The best management research helps practitioners to improve performance in their workplace and drives good practice and innovation. However there remains a gulf between academic management research and practising managers working in organisations across the UK.

The government is clear about the need for higher education institutions to work more closely with business. The Minister for Universities, Rt Hon David Willetts MP, has been particularly vocal in questioning whether the research undertaken by UK business schools truly serves the needs of our businesses. As part of its Growth Review in 2011, the government appointed a Business Schools Task Force to report on options for improving access to appropriate courses and for promoting links between mid-sized businesses with business schools and their students. There is a clear need for increasing the transfer of knowledge and expertise to help to reinvigorate the UK economy.

Closing the gap has also become increasingly important to business schools in view of funding requirements that require academics to show the impact of their research. As the professional body for management and leadership, committed to raising standards of management across the UK, CMI can act as a bridge between academia and industry.

This collection of articles showcases a new CMI initiative which is helping to bring the two sectors closer together. The CMI Management Articles of the Year scheme was introduced in 2011 under the oversight of CMI's Academic Advisory Council. We challenged the research community to submit their work in the form of short articles for review by the professional management community. This process can provide valuable 'real-world' feedback to researchers and also helps busy managers to be guided by their peers' reviews to identify the research that is most valuable to them. This creates an online knowledge transfer 'market place' to enable academics in UK business schools and universities to share their most accessible and relevant research.

The five articles presented here are those which were rated most highly by CMI members in this first year of the project. They are varied in content, from a warning against reverting to command and control management styles in the face of difficult economic times via a case study of radical restructuring and plant closure to a treatise against the 'tyranny' of PowerPoint. All are relevant to the challenges being faced by managers in workplaces across the country.

They do of course represent only a fraction of the many excellent articles submitted to the scheme. We are grateful to all who contributed their work, making this first year such a success, as well as to the CMI members who played their part in reviewing the articles. I strongly encourage any researcher in management and leadership – or whose work has relevance for the challenges faced by managers and leaders – submit a paper to the next round. I urge CMI members to read these articles and to make the most of the insights they offer and I look forward to reading the next set of submissions in the months ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Judge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Sir Paul Judge

Chairman of the Academic Advisory Council, Chartered Management Institute

Introduction

As the only chartered professional body for management and leadership in the UK, CMI provides forward-thinking advice and support on management issues for its 90,000 members and thousands of wider stakeholders.

CMI aims to bring the best research on management topics from leading universities and business schools in the UK to managers in the workplace. This is why we have launched Management Articles of the Year, an annual competition open to academic researchers affiliated to a UK university.

This collection features five of the best articles submitted in 2011-12, as rated by CMI's members.

The purpose of the competition is to assist universities in disseminating their research findings to a wider practising audience, help them demonstrate social and economic impact and raise the profile of their work with employers. It will also benefit practising managers by providing them with insights from credible, authoritative and leading edge researchers from UK universities.

The competition has two features. First, articles entered into the competition are reviewed and rated online by CMI's membership for their usefulness to practising managers. Secondly, the articles achieving the highest average ratings were scrutinised by CMI Academic Advisory Council, a committee made up of leading academics drawn from across the UK.

This is the first year of the competition and we are grateful for the high level of support we have received from the academic community and CMI's membership.

Working in collaboration with the British Academy of Management, the Advanced Institute of Management Research, the Association of Business Schools and the British Library, this innovative initiative is sponsored by John Wiley and Sons Ltd, one of the world's leading business publishers.

To view the articles and the reviews received, or to find out more about entering this competition next year, go to <http://www.managers.org.uk/toparticles>.

Academic Advisory Council

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- Robin Wensley, Emeritus Professor of Policy & Marketing, Public Management and Policy Group, Warwick Business School

About the articles

With the interrelated themes of leadership, change and communication, the articles demonstrate the rich tapestry of academic management literature that interested CMI members in 2011.

The collection begins with the winner of this year's competition, the article from Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe aptly titled "The need to get more for less". The piece places employee engagement centre stage, arguing that we require an approach to leadership that will enable people to do more with less – in a way which does not damage morale and wellbeing – and which will create cultures that support innovation, adaptation, and high readiness for change. The paper challenges classic leadership models, which are "distant" and "heroic", to draw on the first major research investigation of the nature of engaging leadership. It points to "unequivocal evidence" as to the association between employee satisfaction, safety, and organisational performance.

Continuing the evaluation of leadership styles, Hesketh's article "Leading through change" reviews leadership styles during change and crisis, and discusses the options facing managers. Drawing on his own professional experience in the police he concentrates on the challenges facing the service as it responds to "immense financial pressures". The research questions whether a transformational leadership philosophy is going to be an appropriate method under these conditions. It goes on to investigate understandings and practices associated with this approach, and explores what needs to be addressed to ensure the police are positioned to weather the political changes that lay ahead.

Butler, Crundwell and Sweeney in their article ask us to consider "Rethinking change". In the context of macro-economic pressures that are forcing many Western companies to close operations and re-open them elsewhere where costs are lower, Butler et al urge us to consider the importance of effectively managing downsizing and site closures. The authors reached three fundamental conclusions from their experience and research in facility closure management within Vauxhall, Luton: put your people first, make sure you keep running the business and manage your legacy. They develop the ideas into a new business model linked to the emotions of change.

Moving from change management, the next article from Smith and Juwah discusses the importance of 'story-telling' as an innovative approach for communicating academic material to the practitioner community. From their experience, delivering academic input to members of the small and medium enterprise community is problematic because the material is often considered too theoretical or is skewed towards delivery to post graduate or paying corporate clients who dictate the curricula. This practice-based article discusses an innovative, funded course, "Going for Growth", which was delivered to small business managers using complementary practice-based stories.

Finally, Gabriel offers a thought-provoking treatise "Against the tyranny of PowerPoint". Assessing the impact of the technology on how we communicate, the author shows that it has emerged as a powerful piece of communication technology, having profound consequences on business presentations and, possibly, on the nature of lecturing itself. He criticises users of PowerPoint for uncritically presenting information and relying on visual aids to support weak analysis. He argues, however, that PowerPoint can be used more creatively, to build on our culture's emphasis on spectacle and image. In this manner, it can redefine the nature of a lecture, from the authoritative presentation of a text into a multimedia performance that elicits a critical, creative and active response from its audience.

Article 1

The 'need to get more for less': a new model of 'engaging leadership' and evidence of its effect on team productivity, and staff morale and wellbeing at work

Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe, Professor of Leadership, University of Bradford School of Management, Professor Emeritus of Leadership Studies, University of Leeds & Chief Executive, Real World Group & **Juliette Alban-Metcalfe**, Managing Director, Real World Group

September 2011

1.1 Introduction

Even before the effects of the current economic crisis, organisations were aware of the need to be more innovative, handling rapid and complex change competently, and to be more effective in utilising organisational resources, including, most importantly, their people resources. It falls to leaders to get more from their staff, in ways that do not reduce morale, and wellbeing, not only for ethical reasons, but because damaging either will ensure that any benefits will be short-lived, with the most talented probably taking their talents elsewhere.

This raises critical questions about the nature of leadership and the use of human capital – the knowledge, skills and personal attributes that, when applied in people's efforts, create economic value; and, the sharing of social capital – the connections between people and groups that increase innovation, learning and productivity in organisations.

In a major investigation of the nature of day-to-day leadership in the UK, we identified a model that enables organisations to build leadership capacity, and embed cultures of innovation, proactivity and high 'readiness for change', while at the same time creating an environment in which employees can be more productive and experience higher levels of motivation and wellbeing. The model, which focuses on the notion of 'engagement', has been tested with thousands of managers, in a range of organisations internationally, from petrochemical and luxury goods to healthcare and local government, and was found to significantly increase levels of employee engagement. A second three-year investigation showed that this approach to leadership, when embedded in the culture of teams, has a significant impact on productivity.

This paper briefly describes the research findings from these two studies and the implications for managers and organisations in creating cultures of engagement, innovation, high 'readiness for change' and high levels of productivity. It also describes recent developments in the academic literature on leadership and employee engagement.

1.2 'Engagement': what is it, and why is it so important?

Engagement has been described as:

"a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. The organisation must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employee and employer." (Robinson et al. 2004)

A survey of 450 HR directors in the UK found that:

"Almost two-thirds (59 per cent) of HR directors questioned picked out employee engagement as key for their business over the next year, suggesting it will play a major part in driving businesses out of the recession". (NorthgateArinso 2010)

In essence, engagement relates to the degree of discretionary effort employees are willing to apply to their work. Research evidence is that engagement is good for people and good for organisations.

Engagement is good for employees

One of the dangers of increasing pressure on employees to be more productive is that it increases stress, which damages individuals and is costly for organisations, with increased absence and reduced effort and morale. Engagement has been described as the opposite

of burnout (Maslach et al. 2001). Conversely, a primary driver in working life is to have a strong sense of purpose and meaning in what we do, and the ability to employ our personal resources, including skills we have acquired, and our learning from experiences, for an organisation in whose values we believe. We also need to feel valued for our contribution.

Engagement, which has been found to correlate significantly with levels of employee wellbeing, has been described as the:

“harnessing of organisational members’ selves to their work role. In engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during their role performance.” (Kahn 1990)

Engagement is good for organisations

The business case for engagement is not based on altruism, but on hard evidence that it increases the effectiveness of organisations and employee performance in a variety of ways. For example, engagement has been found to correlate significantly with customer service, organisational commitment, lower absenteeism and turnover, and increased safety behaviour (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe 2008). Also, numerous survey studies have revealed that organisations with cultures of high levels of engagement outperform their competitors in relation to productivity and profitability (AON Hewitt 2010, Sirota Survey Intelligence 2006, Towers Perrin 2005, Watson Wyatt 2006). The government-commissioned MacLeod Review of Employee Engagement (2009), which includes numerous examples from academic research and an extensive range of organisational case studies, states: *“at its core is a blindingly obvious but nevertheless often overlooked truth. If it is how the workforce performs that determines to a large extent whether companies or organisations succeed, then whether or not the workforce is positively encouraged to perform at its best should be a prime consideration for every leader and manager, and be placed at the heart of business strategy”.* (MacLeod & Clark 2009)

The question is, “How can we increase employee engagement?”

The academic literature shows that one of the most important variables contributing to ‘engagement’ is the behaviour of the line manager. Negative corroboration of this relationship was found in the Towers Perrin survey, which reported that:

“while many people are keen to contribute more at work, the behaviour of their managers and the culture of their organisation is actively discouraging them from doing so”. (Towers Perrin 2005)

1.3 What form of leadership produces high levels of employee engagement?

Changing notions of leadership

The leadership literature can be confusing, not least because notions of leadership evolve over time, affected by changes in economic, political, social, technological, and ecological factors.

US ‘heroic’ models of leadership, dominated the 1980s and 90s, including ‘visionary’, ‘charismatic’ and ‘transformational’ leadership, based largely on studies (often self-reports) of CEOs of large US-based multi-national companies, most of whom were male. Criticism of an emphasis on the ‘inspirational-charismatic’ aspects of leadership grew in the 1990s alongside awareness of the ‘dark side of charisma’, which might include arrogance, narcissistic and manipulative behaviours, and be associated with an inability to build and support a team. The focus of researchers on ‘the leader’ failed to acknowledge the reciprocal influence of the follower-leader relationship, or the concept of ‘shared’ leadership, that is, that leadership is not the sole preserve of those occupying formal leadership roles, but also emerges when people work together effectively (Alimo-Metcalfe, Bradley & Alban-Metcalfe 2011).

Challenges to the ‘heroic’ models of leadership grew in the wake of the series of corporate scandals, including those involving Enron and Lehman Brothers in the US, and the Royal Bank of Scotland in the UK, which were attributed largely to the failure of corporate governance and the hubris of those occupying the most senior leadership roles.

Post-heroic models of leadership

In the wake of growing dissatisfaction with ‘distant’, ‘heroic’ leadership, new notions of leadership evolved placing emphasis on leadership as a social process – i.e. emerging as the product of effective interaction – and emphasising the ethical behaviour of leaders. These included models of ‘ethical’ and ‘authentic’ leadership. However, while providing valuable contributions to the notion of what characteristics make an effective ‘leader’, they do not directly address the question as to how to engage employees in the work of the organisation (Alimo-Metcalfe, Bradley & Alban-Metcalfe 2011).

Research into ‘engaging’ leadership in the UK

The nature of the relationship between staff and their line managers became the focus of our first major investigation into the characteristics of ‘nearby’ (day-to-day) leadership, which ultimately enabled us to create a model of ‘engaging transformational leadership’. Our interest was to identify the behaviours of line managers that had “a particularly powerful effect on the motivation, self-confidence, self-efficacy, or performance” of their staff (Alimo-Metcalfe, Bradley & Alban-Metcalfe 2011).

We argued that ‘nearby’ leadership was best judged by leaders’ direct reports, rather than by asking leaders what made them effective. Importantly, our sample was the first to be truly inclusive of gender, ethnicity, organisational level and age. We believe that it is the first substantial, comprehensive, empirically-based and validated model of ‘engaging leadership’.

The sample comprised over 4,500 public and private sector (FTSE100 companies) staff in over 200 organisations based in the UK, making it one of the largest investigations of leadership ever conducted (Alban-Metcalfe & Alimo-Metcalfe 2000, 2007a, 2007b); Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe 2001, 2002, 2005). Figure 1.1 shows the 14 dimensions in four clusters: ‘personal qualities and values’, ‘engaging individuals’, ‘engaging the team/organisation’, and ‘moving forward together’.

Engaging with Individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showing Genuine Concern • Being Accessible • Enabling • Encouraging Questioning
Engaging the Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting a Developmental Culture • Inspiring Others • Focusing Team Effort • Being Decisive
Engaging the Stakeholders – Moving Forward Together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building Shared Vision • Networking • Resolving Complex Issues • Facilitating Change Sensitively
Personal Qualities and Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being Honest and Consistent • Acting with Integrity

Figure 1.1 A Model of Engaging Transformational Leadership

This model of engaging leadership closely resembles Greenleaf's notion of 'servant leadership', but also emphasises working in genuine partnership with a range of other internal and external stakeholders, being sensitive to their agenda and needs, and being decisive when required. Strong themes emerged relating to building shared visions, and creating environments in which empowerment, appreciation, curiosity, experimentation, questioning the status quo, and learning, are highly valued. Such leadership is not confined to those who occupy formal leadership roles; rather, it is a process distributed throughout an organisation.

The 360-feedback instrument developed to assess these behaviours, the Transformational Leadership Questionnaire™ (TLQ™), includes 10 measures of the impact of leadership on staff's motivation, job satisfaction, commitment, and reduced work-related stress, enabling us to analyse the effect of specific leadership behaviours on staff (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe 2003). The evidence, based on data gathered from the 360 ratings of several thousand private and public sector managers, is that, whatever the organisation, sector, or occupational group, an engaging style of leadership does have a significant positive effect on staff attitudes and wellbeing (Alban-Metcalfe & Alimo-Metcalfe 2000 2007a & 2007b).

While these findings provide evidence that these behaviours of leadership affect levels of engagement of employees, the most important question is whether they ultimately affect the performance and productivity of an organisation.

This was addressed in the second study.

1.4 Engaging leadership and its impact on performance & productivity: a longitudinal research study

There are very few published academic studies which show a causal (cause and effect) relationship between leadership and performance.

Many studies in the academic literature that show a correlation between leadership and performance are cross-sectional in nature. Also, most studies have adopted subjective measures of performance, (e.g. the ratings of the team leaders of their team's effectiveness), rather than objective external ratings. Causal relationships can only be determined through a longitudinal investigation, e.g. assessing leadership at Time 1, and assessing performance objectively, at Time 2. There is also the need to control for contextual variables, such as the size of the team, the resources at its disposal and a number of other relevant factors. We undertook a three year longitudinal investigation of the impact of the leadership culture of teams, on their productivity, using our model of engaging transformational leadership. We also assessed team morale and wellbeing, since this potentially impacts on sustainability of performance (Department of Health, NHS R&D SDO Grant 2002/22). The project assessed the impact of leadership on productivity and staff attitudes and wellbeing, among 46 multi-professional mental health teams¹. The research was undertaken by Real World Group, and researchers at King's College London (Alimo-Metcalfe et al. 2007).

We controlled for a range of important variables (e.g. range of expertise within the team, resources available, etc.) that could affect the teams' performance. Leadership was assessed using the Leadership Culture & Change Inventory (LCCI)², which is based on a combination of the engaging leadership dimensions in the TLQ, plus 14 leadership competencies, identified by experts in the field.

The findings

Analysis of the anonymous ratings of a national sample of 731 team members led to the emergence of three dimensions of leadership culture: 'Engaging with Others', 'Visionary Leadership'; and 'Leadership Capabilities'. These were assessed at Time 1, along with 12 aspects of staff attitudes and wellbeing. All three leadership dimensions were significant 'predictors' of different aspects of staff's attitudes to work, and wellbeing at work (see Figure 1.2) (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe 2010).

¹ The purpose of 'Crisis Resolution Teams' is to keep mental healthcare users out of hospitals, by supporting them in their homes.

² The Leadership Culture & Change Inventory (LCCI)

Impact measure / Leadership dimension	Engaging with Others	Visionary Leadership	Leadership Capabilities
Attitudes to Work			
A high level of job satisfaction	X		X
A high level of motivation to achieve	X	X	X
A strong sense of job commitment	X		
A strong sense of organisational commitment	X		
Wellbeing at Work			
A high sense of fulfilment	X	X	
A high level of self esteem	X	X	
A high level of self-confidence	X		X
A low level of job-related stress	X	X	
A low level of job-related emotional exhaustion	X	X	
A strong sense of team spirit	X		
A strong sense of team effectiveness	X	X	X

Figure 1.2 The impact of the three leadership dimensions of teams on staff's engagement & wellbeing (n = 731)

We also examined whether any of the leadership dimensions, assessed at Time 1, significantly predicted the productivity of the teams 10-12 months later (Time 2). The results showed that of the three scales, only 'Engaging with Others' was a significant predictor of productivity, even when allowance had been made for the effect of contextual factors. As far as we are aware, this is one of only a few studies to have provided evidence of a cause-effect relationship between leadership behaviour and organisational performance, when the effect of the context has been taken into account. Figure 1.3 shows examples of how engagement was enacted in high performing teams (Alimo-Metcalfe et al. 2008, Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe 2011a).

- **Engaging important stakeholders** from the outset to shape the nature of the service; this formed the basis of continuing strong relationships necessary for the teams to succeed.
- **Collective vision of good quality service:** team leadership ensured that the vision of the team, and the operational policies were shaped by team members to create a sense of 'ownership' of their work and of belonging to something they valued. Regular meetings and informal communication, such as office banter, kept the vision alive.
- **Non-hierarchical teams:** while there was an appointed leader in every team, a culture of devolved leadership encouraged people to take the lead where it was appropriate for them to do so.
- **Supportive culture:** informal support from colleagues and the team lead, and formal support in the form of regular individual and group reviews, ensured that people felt comfortable in seeking advice and sharing work-related problems. This created a culture of joint problem-solving, which empowered team members to take the risks necessary to be innovative.
- **Successful change management:** team leads ensured team members were consulted on impending changes and their response taken into consideration. The result was a collective team response to top-down changes and the formulation of a joint action-plan for addressing such changes.

Figure 1.3 Characteristics of Leadership in High Performing Teams

Leadership & competencies

It is important to note that the scale which included the leadership competencies, 'Leadership Capabilities', did not predict team productivity. This is consistent with other studies investigating the effect of competencies on performance, and has important implications for organisations that adopt leadership competency frameworks. Clearly, it is not that being competent is unimportant. Rather, what our research and that of other academics reveals, is that it is how one enacts one's competencies that determines the effect one has on morale, wellbeing, commitment, the level of engagement of staff and of teams – and performance (Bolden & Gosling 2006; Hollenbeck et al. 2006). Thus: *"A competency framework could be considered like sheet music, a diagrammatic representation of the melody. It is only in the arrangement, playing and performance, however, that the piece truly comes to life."* (Bolden & Gosling 2006)

Does engaging leadership make a difference in all sectors?

The short answer is yes. Our model has been adopted successfully across the world from the top of organisations in the private sector (including finance, petrochemical industry, retail, manufacturing, telecommunications, IT, utilities and construction) and all public sector industries. An engaging approach to leadership is natural and intuitive for most people, so we find that almost immediately from being introduced to it managers start to adopt healthier, more effective leadership behaviours. PhD-level and other independent studies have independently confirmed the validity of the engaging leadership model across the world.

Organisational impact has been clearly demonstrated from noticeable increases in profitability, to savings of millions of pounds in 18 months, to statistically significant cultural shifts in people's wellbeing and positive attitudes to work. These changes tend to happen quickly – for example, one organisation we worked for went from dire straits to the Times Top 20 Best Employers to Work For in less than two years (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe 2008, Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe 2011b).

1.6 Conclusions

The challenges facing organisations, even as they grow out of this severe recession, are enormous. Organisations need to exploit positively all the talent of the resourceful humans they employ, and to do this in a way which nourishes the human spirit, rather than destroys it. In other words, they must create cultures of genuine engagement.

We now know exactly what the leadership behaviours are that will make this happen, because we know what works, and why it works. It is now beholden on those in formal leadership positions to commit themselves to adopting such behaviours. This is particularly true for senior managers, since we know from countless studies that they are the major influence on the organisation's culture, but are typically found to be least likely to participate actively in leadership development (Alimo-Metcalfe, Ford, Harding & Lawler 2000).

One important word of warning is that, when under pressure to deliver on tough objectives, managers typically default to the 'command and control' style of leadership. This would be disastrous. It would dis-engage the very people on whose efforts and goodwill organisations depend.

Finally, the findings from our research, and that of others, has considerable implications for several organisational practices, including: (i) the criteria adopted to recruit staff – particularly managers, at all levels; (ii) the nature of the quality, focus, and content of appraisal/development reviews; (iii) the nature of the performance management processes; and, perhaps most importantly, (iv) the leadership framework and related 360-feedback processes adopted by the organisation. Our experience is that this is the starting point for effective transformation. Those organisations that do embrace fully an engaging leadership approach are most likely to build the leadership capacity required to sustain success in a far more demanding environment.

1.7 About the authors

Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe, Professor of Leadership, University of Bradford School of Management, Professor Emeritus of Leadership Studies, University of Leeds & Chief Executive, Real World Group



Beverly, who is a chartered organisational psychologist and Fellow of the British Psychological Society, has an international reputation in the field of leadership studies. She has a passionate interest in translating academic research into a form that is accessible to wide audiences, and supporting organisations in embedding the ethical application of leadership, in valuing diversity, and in supporting individuals and organisations in strengthening their capacity for engagement, collaboration, innovation and effectiveness.

In 2001, while holding the Chair of Leadership Studies at the University of Leeds, as a result of ground-breaking research into the nature of leadership, she established a Leeds University spin-out company, Real World Group, which undertakes research into leadership, culture, and diversity and inclusion; creates robust diagnostic instruments; and undertakes major cultural transformation projects across the private and public sector, internationally.

She spends much of her time working at Board level on the implementation of major organisational change programmes, and introducing the notion of engaging leadership and readiness for change at conferences and organisational seminars. Her numerous advisory roles include membership of the Government's 'guru group' on Employee Engagement, and the CMI's Academic Advisory Council. She spends much of her time working abroad.

Juliette Alban-Metcalfe, Managing Director, Real World Group



Juliette is an Organisational Psychologist and Managing Director of Real World Group. She has a particular interest in leadership, diversity and inclusion, Appreciative Inquiry and other positive approaches to organisation development and change.

Juliette's ground-breaking research includes a range of studies in the public and private sectors investigating barriers to career progression for underrepresented groups in leadership. She has authored a number of articles and book chapters on the subject of leadership and career progression and works with leaders and teams in senior levels across the UK and internationally.

She has an MSc in Organizational Psychology from the University of London, Birkbeck College, and a Master of Science in Positive Organization Development and Change (MPOD) from Case Western Reserve University, Ohio.

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Article 2

Leading through change: To what extent is a Transformational approach appropriate during unprecedented restructuring of the Police?

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September 2011

2.1 Introduction

This article aims to critically review leadership characteristics in the context of police readiness to absorb whole scale radical changes to the way it does business. As such, it focuses on the relationship between change and leadership.

As the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) involved massive cut backs in police funding, the police need to be ready to deliver services within the economic landscape imposed. This work reviews leadership styles during change and crisis, and discusses the various options managers are faced with. The research questions whether a Transformational Leadership philosophy is going to be an appropriate method of supervising the delivery of policing services under what are anticipated to be immense financial pressures. It investigates understandings and practices associated with an transformational approach, and explores what needs to be addressed to ensure the police are positioned to weather the storm that lay ahead.

The police have undertaken a programme of Leadership Training (Core leadership Development Programme) over recent years in collaboration with the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) and National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA), formerly CENTREX. The programme champions the Transformational Leadership approach, comparing its merits with those of Transactional Leadership attributes. Although it recognises that there are occasions when a Transactional approach may be favourable, for example in public order situations; the emphasis is on Transformational qualities as a preference.

The CSR has directed that the cost of public services is cut. The police have not been exempt from this. The extraordinary change programme that ensues will undoubtedly involve leadership challenges that have never been experienced previously by current police managers. To that extent, this work critically reviews what approach to leadership provides best fit.

It is acknowledged that there are many perspectives of both change and leadership. This review will remain within the scope of Transformational and Transactional leadership, specifically addressing 'leaders in organisations' (Bryman 1992). The rationale is that these 'close/nearby leaders' (Antonakisa & Atwater 2002) are positioned to affect the change programme via their leadership approach.

2.2 Literature review

This review of literature examines Leadership, specifically in the transformational and transactional domains. It examines the origins of Transformational Leadership and situates the approach in the context of public service, middle management, in the UK. The review explores the merits and shortfalls of its application as an approach during times of radical change. In this context it can scrutinise the contested nature of Transformational Leadership, and the theoretical arguments posed. It concludes with a synopsis of the virtues of Transformational Leadership training and development, referring to the literature by Parry & Sinha (2005).

History of Transformational Leadership

The term Transformational Leadership was first coined by Downton (1973). According to Hunt (1999) it developed out of the 'doom and gloom' arguments in the 70s. The actual leadership concept set out as 'Transforming Leadership' is first ascribed to Burns in 1978, who used the term in a description of politicians: "Leadership is the shaping of private and public opinion" (Burns 1978, p.33). There are also relationships to followership. Bass (1985) developed this notion further, relating it with that of Transactional approaches, and developing the theory of followers as the primary focus. This play on the ability to influence followers also cites the 'Beyond Expectations' philosophy (Bass 1985), which links leadership and sustainable performance. This emphasises transformational leadership with charisma

as a major component (Hunt 1999), the ability for a leader to ‘cause’ employees to do more than what is expected of them.

Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe also used a political analogy to illustrate the two leadership styles, positing that Transformational approaches as motivating politicians to go beyond their self interest to work for the ‘greater good,’ whilst a Transactional approach epitomises the trading of promises for votes (2005, p.52). This charismatic element is given further support by Northouse (2004), who recognised that Transformational Leadership is the focus of many scholars’ attention. However, providing one of the few criticisms of Transformational Leadership, he also warned that this can be abused and used for destructive purposes (p.187). Parry (2010) develops the boundaries of charisma further, discussing notions of love and happiness as linked variables. The relationship with culture and leadership must also be acknowledged. Schein suggests that “culture creation and management are the essence of leadership” (2004, p.1). He proposed that as time passes leadership is influenced by culture, and culture is influenced by leadership; an evolutionary perspective (Schein 2004).

Change Leadership – Transformational vs Transactional

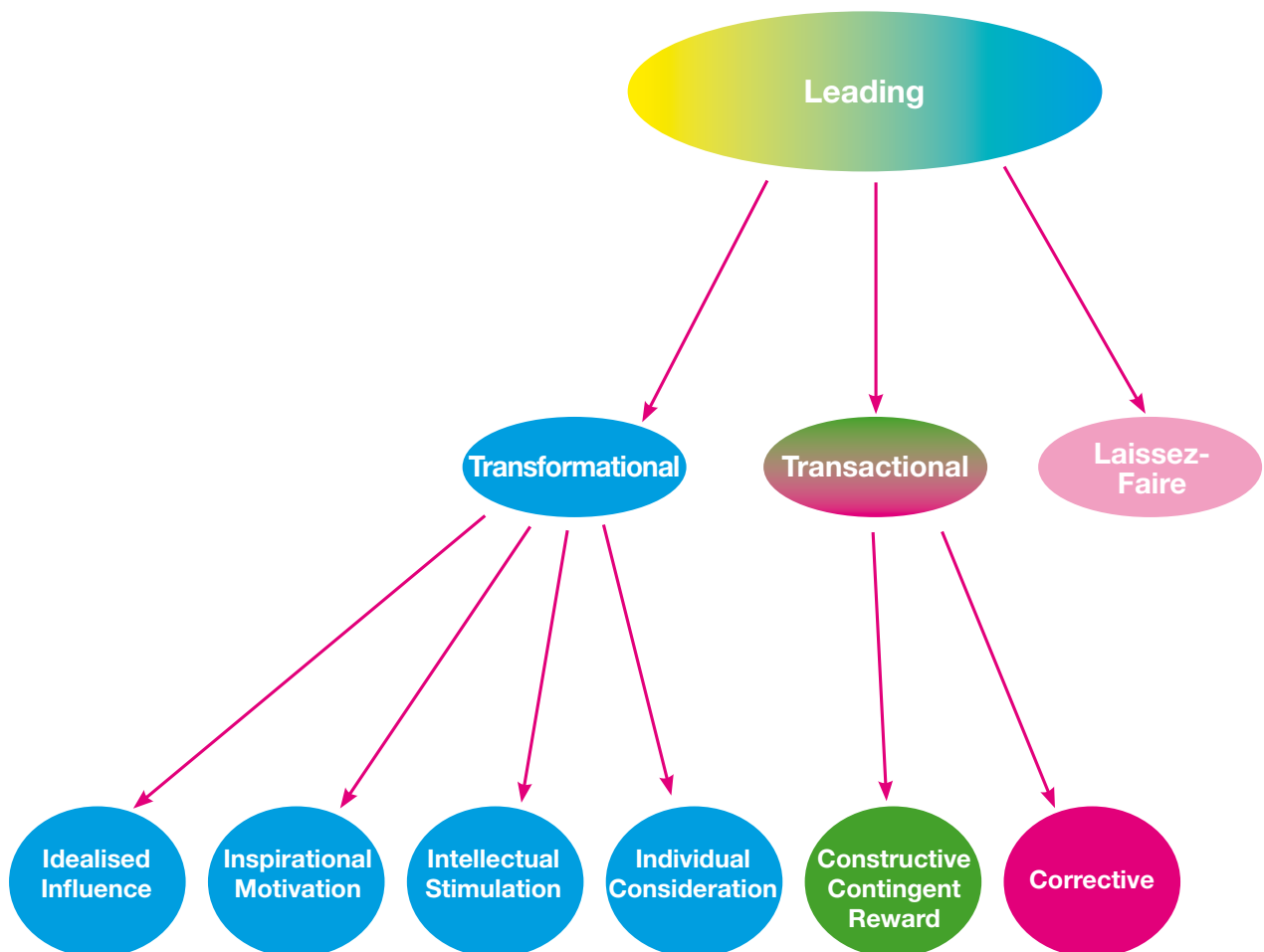


Figure 2.1 Leadership Dimensions (adapted from Parry 2001)

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire is the most widely used instrument for assessing Transformational Leadership (Den Hartog, Van Muijen, & Koopman 1997). MLQ-6s (Northouse 2004), measures seven factors of leadership (as in Figure 2.1), scoring them high, moderate and low:

Transformational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Factor 1. Idealised influence indicates whether you hold subordinates' trust, maintain their faith and respect, show dedication to them, appeal to their hopes and dreams, and act as their role model. Also labeled 'charisma.' Factor 2. Inspirational motivation measures the degree to which you provide vision, use appropriate symbols and images to help others focus on their work, and try to make others feel that their work is significant. They communicate high expectations, inspiring and motivating their staff. Factor 3. Intellectual stimulation shows the degree to which you encourage others to be creative in looking at old problems in new ways, create an environment that is tolerant of seemingly extreme positions, and nurture people to question their own values and beliefs and those of the organisation. Factor 4. Individualised consideration indicates the degree to which you show interest in others' wellbeing, assign projects individually, and pay attention to those who seem less involved in the group (Northouse, 2004, p.196).
Transactional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Factor 5. Contingent reward shows the degree to which you tell others what to do in order to be rewarded, emphasise what you expect from them, and recognise their accomplishments (Northouse, 2004, p.196). Bass (2006) comments that Contingent Reward can also be Transformational if the reward is psychological, such as praise for a job well done. Factor 6. Management-by-exception assesses whether you tell others the job requirements, are content with standard performance, and are a believer in 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it.'(Northouse, 2004, p.196). Bass (2006) develops this further, suggesting Passive and Active forms of this transaction.
Laissez-faire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Factor 7. Laissez-faire measures whether you require little of others, are content to let things ride, and let others do their own thing (Northouse, 2004, p.196). The avoidance or absence of Leadership according to Bass (2006).

Figure 2.2 Factors influencing Transformational Leadership

According to Bass and Avolio (1990), Factors 1, 2, 3 and 4 are dimensions of Transformational Leadership. Factors 5 and 6 are dimensions of Transactional leadership. Factor 7 sits alone.

Figure 2.3 illustrates the effectiveness of these attributes according to Bass (2006). In a policing environment the optimal profile may involve including some of the Contingent Reward and Management by Exception approaches in the lower end of effectiveness.

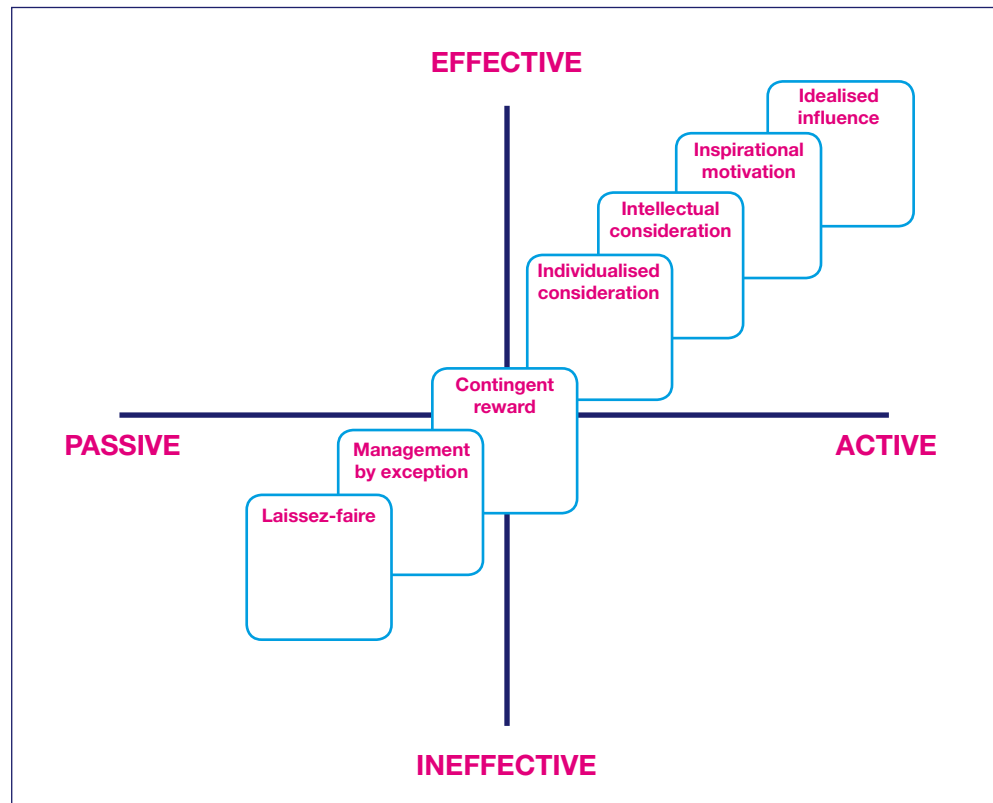


Figure 2.3 Effectiveness of management factors

Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe (1998) distills the 'clusters and dimensions' of transformational leadership into three broad headings, listing 14 qualities of a transformational leader:

1. Leading and Developing others

- Showing genuine concern
- Enabling
- Being accessible
- Encouraging change

2. Personal Qualities

- Being honest & Consistent
- Acting with integrity
- Being Decisive
- Inspiring others
- Resolving complex problems

3. Leading the Organisation

- Networking & achieving
- Focuses effort
- Building a shared vision
- Supporting a developmental culture
- Facilitating change sensibly

Zaleznik (1993) contrasts the approach with that of transactional leaders, who he describes as managers, often being seen as “inflexible, detached and manipulative” (cited in Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe 2001). The aim of this work is to provide evidence that a Transformational approach provides an optimum leadership strategy through change programmes.

Northouse (2004, p.169) comments:

“...transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms individuals. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long term goals, and includes assessing followers motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings...it involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them”.

This is supported further by Bass (1990, p.22):

“...various types of evaluations including performance ratings by both supervisors and direct reports, as well as standard financial measures have produced a similar correlation between transformational behaviour and high ratings”.

US and UK studies

In Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2005) the issue of US leadership is discussed. They question whether contemporary research in America can be relied upon here in the UK to make informed judgements. The proposition is that a large amount of current US research is based on surveys of senior management in large corporations, in contrast to earlier studies of lower level managers and supervisors. They emphasise the importance of describing exactly what the focus of the research is, and the data collection methods employed. Bryman (1992) also makes reference to this, arguing that much of the qualitative data is based on CEOs and as such addresses leaders of organisations, rather than in organisations (p.157).

Can Transformational Leadership be taught?

Bass (1990) argues that Transformational Leadership can be developed through training, learning the techniques and qualities required to become a Transformational Leader. Parry and Sinha (2005) provide support, suggesting that factors of Transformational Leadership can be developed through training, and that training does result in more effective leadership behaviour (p.179). They propose that leadership training improves transformational behaviours irrespective of which areas are concentrated on during developmental plans. Furthermore, they suggest that this does not reduce transactional leadership attributes either. Bryman (1992) argues that Transformational Leadership can be viewed as a personality trait, suggesting that as a ‘trait’ it could be difficult to teach. This somewhat harks back to the leadership issue of ‘are leaders born, or can they be taught’ argument. Kotter makes the observation that “... the twenty-first century employee will need to know more about leadership and management than did his or her twentieth century counterpart:” (1996, p.175). This statement epitomises the aims of this article, highlighting the importance of studying and adopting a Transformational approach.

2.3 Findings & Interpretation

The literature reviewed fully supports a Transformational approach as ‘best fit’ to lead through change. In a police environment it suggests that relationships between leadership styles are somewhat closer than may be found in other organisations; and may frequently overlap. As alluded to in the introduction, the diverse nature of policing does call for transactional approaches to be adopted on occasion; for example policing demonstrations, football matches; or at public order incidents. To illustrate this concept Figure 2.4 contrasts the full range leadership modelled in Figure 2.3 with that of the relationship that is proposed to be effective in the police.

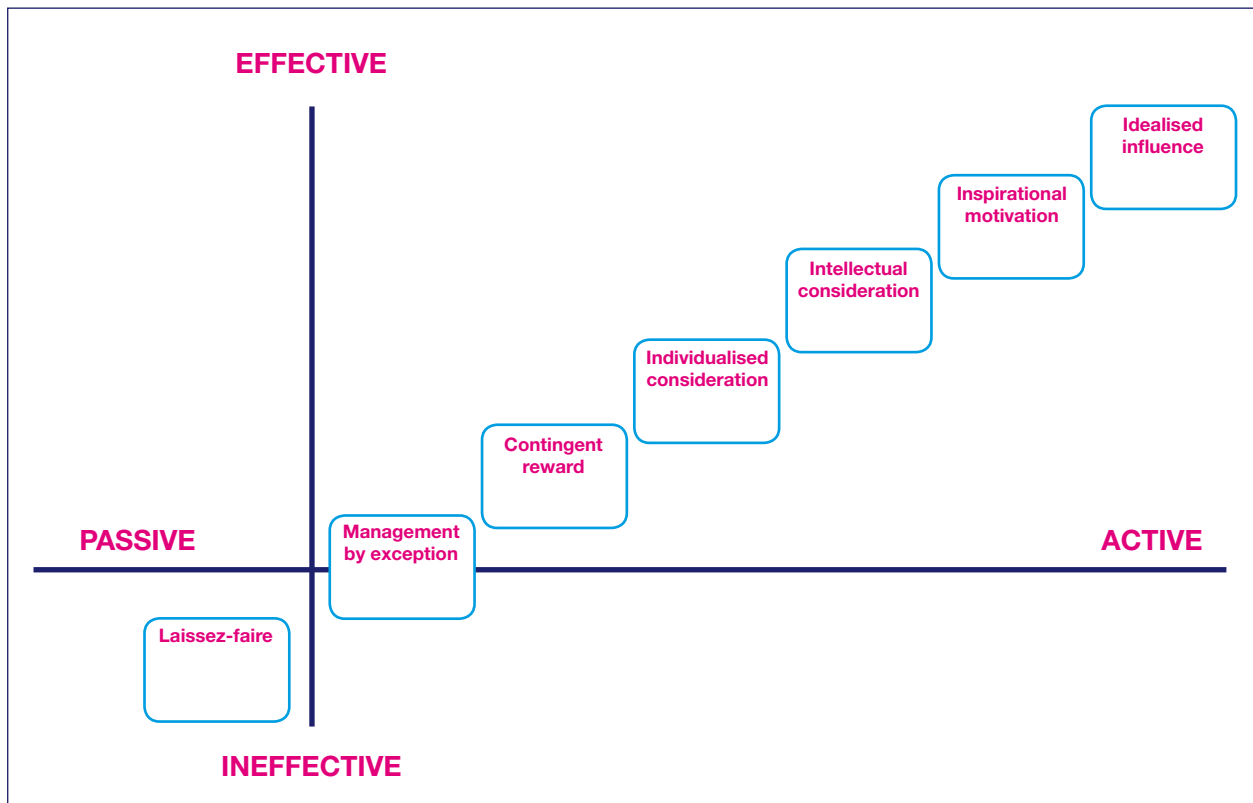


Figure 2.4. Proposed leadership effectiveness in the police. Adapted from Bass (2006)

‘Close/nearby’ leaders (Antonakisa & Atwater, 2002) present as ‘leader as a servant’, in contrast to US models of ‘heroic charismatic leadership’, based on distant leaders that present at Chief Executive level (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005, p.62). This is an important distinction to make. The difference between the ‘leader as servant’ interpretation over a ‘transformational’ approach appears to be the subjects’ primary focus on the follower (leaders as servants), rather than on the organisation (transformational), and the commitment towards getting followers to address organisational priorities (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004).

This is a closer relationship than that of the US findings on leadership, which are focussed on top executives, who carry out a completely different role. Research by Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Tichy and DeVanna (1986, 1990) also focus on top managers and CEOs, and are not particularly helpful to inform this research (Northouse, 2004, pp.180-182). Kotter (1996) supports a leadership approach for facilitating change, quoting a split weighting of 70-90 per cent effective leadership against 10-30 per cent management as contributing to the success of such change programmes (p.26).

2.4 Conclusions

This work set out to explore if the police are equipped and prepared to embark on a massive change programme in respect of the leaders it has empowered to deliver services under these conditions. It has questioned whether Transformational leadership is appropriate; and concluded that it is. It has clear benefits for the organisation and all of its employees. Employees feel satisfied in their work, and the organisation has a workforce that goes beyond what is required of it (Bass 1985). Middle managers undoubtedly play a critical role in change programmes. They have to undertake personal change, help their teams through change and take on board new roles and responsibilities. These are all dynamics of the ‘readiness’ stage referred to by Balogun (2001, p.10). This is as well as carrying out the day to day business of the organisation.

The proposal is that leadership roles need to be executed by highly competent individuals, who can provide effective communications channels between employees and senior managers. A transformational approach definitely provides the optimum characteristics to carry this out effectively. The combination of proactivity, radical thinking, a high tolerance for ambiguity, emotional intelligence, and an understanding of the need for change meet the specification square on. Bennis summarised this as being able to 'live the dream' (1989). What perhaps is more important is that middle managers do not drift into a state of 'socialised helplessness' described in Brooks & Bates (1994, p.180), where a lack of control and direction become clearly evident; having devastating consequences on subordinates. This factor, more than any other, highlights the importance of ensuring that the right people are in the right place for effective implementation.

The conclusions would include an observation that as the purse strings tighten, senior managers may become more transactional in their approach, yet this is proven to be an unsuccessful strategy mid to long term (Dobby, Anscombe, & Tuffin 2004). The extreme transactional focus on performance exhibited by some senior managers presents a real challenge for middle management, but as the Home Office police leadership guidance clearly directs, performance should be delivered as a consequence of a transformational approach (2004, p.32). It is therefore vital those middle managers are able to identify and translate the behaviours exhibited, whilst recognising the urgency to address performance issues communicated by senior managers. They must 'dilute' communications sufficiently for the workforce in general to be able to understand, cooperate and deliver the service levels requested. This work does not include a strategy to address senior management leadership styles, but recognises the impact this can have.

In a police environment the relationships between the leadership styles are somewhat closer than may be found in other organisations, and may overlap on occasion. As alluded to in the introduction, the diverse nature of policing does call for transactional approaches to be adopted on occasion. It is proposed the following relationship may exist successfully in police leadership:

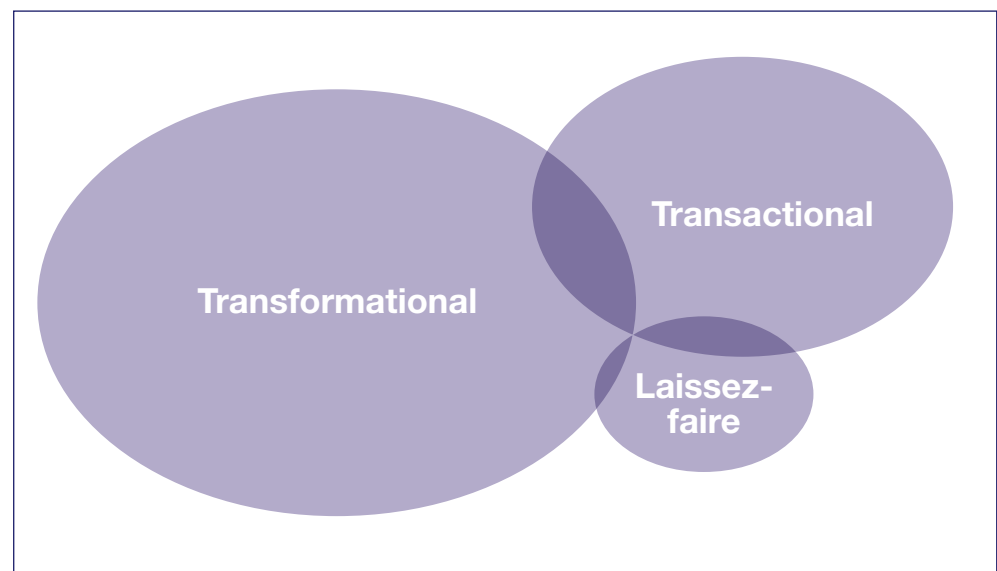


Figure 2.4 Proposed Leadership Relationship in the Police

Overall the police have the capability (Balogun, 2010) to withstand the change programme. Employees have recognised the need, but not all are fully prepared for implementation. Leadership is vital and a Transformational approach provides the optimum strategy.

2.5 About the author

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Ian is now studying part time for a PhD at Lancaster University Management School, alongside a career in the police. His current research explores Wellbeing as a construct, and focuses on motivation, psychological contract and discretionary effort theories as elements through which to view it. He wishes to explore to what extent these vary as employees transition through working life. What threatens these phenomena, and can managers become competent in recognising attitudinal shifts, intervening early and effectively to facilitate a fulfilling working life for their employees? The work is orientated to a policing environment and is ethnographically based. Ian works on the Sustaining Excellence team at Lancashire Police headquarters.

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Article 3

Rethinking change: downsizing businesses, changing behaviours and still managing to come out on top

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October 2011

3.1 Introduction

As an indicator of global change and shifting balances of power, every September in Dalian, China, the World Economic Forum meets. The subject in 2011: Mastering Quality Growth.

On the agenda was pursuing new frontiers of growth linked to embracing disruptive innovation. With growth coming from emerging markets, and European and North American economies treading water, many firms in the West are facing the reality of having to not just downsize but actually close manufacturing operations and re-open them elsewhere, where costs are lower, to remain competitive.

Low capacity utilisation in highly capital-intensive industries is proving to be unsustainable. The language in the Boardroom is also turning to thoughts of closure and sell-off when previously it was a little nip here, a tuck there. In an attempt to protect customer-facing brands a false cloud of optimism hangs in the air of industry. The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) in a survey of 5,600 companies found “welcome progress” in confidence levels between April and June 2009, which has been sustained (BCC 2009). Yet the BCC also revealed that unemployment is still expected to remain high.

The pessimism is echoed by the Office for National Statistics, which in the most recent figures show growth at 0.2 per cent³ (ONS 2010). Indeed, in 2012, the UK entered a double dip recession, and the Eurozone crisis continues. If downsizing is the only remaining strategic option, it is always a painful experience for all those involved. There are thousands of books on “change management”, a phrase that so many managers profess to be experts in. Yet very few of these devote much time to downsizing, preferring to talk about re-engineering or restructuring. What lessons are available from the past to achieve a positive outcome from what will inevitably be something of a human, as well as an economic, tragedy?

The authors reached three fundamental conclusions from their experience and research in facility closure management within Vauxhall, UK: put your people first, make sure you keep running the business and manage your legacy.

3.2 Background

The research into the right way to downsize began almost a decade ago.

The motor industry in Europe was going through a major structural change at the turn of the millennium with families eschewing the two car per household model – one large one small – for more versatile smaller people carrier options. This led to General Motors (GM) having to reconsider their manufacturing capacity for larger cars, and the Vauxhall Luton facility in the UK was earmarked for closure. However, such was the demand curve for the model being produced there, almost eighteen months of production was required for the old model before the doors of the plant could be finally closed.

The outline plan was that approximately 1,000 employees were to be transferred to a sister GM van manufacturing factory almost next door to the car plant. The remaining workforce were to remain on site to build cars till the final closure. So the challenges of keeping up all the production metrics, and maintaining the wider business outside of the Luton plant, were going to be considerable – faced with a clear “no future” for the staff through the many final months.

As the management of the business subsequently explained, there was no guidebook on “how to close a car plant” – only a few talented managers who wanted to do the best for their people, and the organisation they worked for. And they must have done something right, as the Production Manager of the plant said after the plant finally closed eighteen months after the original announcement:

³ This was at the time of writing (ONS Figures Q2: 2011).

“The atmosphere in the place in the run-down was just unbelievable. We built our schedule right the way through. In fact we raised the line speed...so we built more cars, we ran out early...and...we had the best result EVER on our performance audit.”

So why was Luton different? What did the managers do that resulted in improved performance, not reduced performance?

Previous studies of the consequences of downsizing, by for example W. F. Cascio, found that operational performance deteriorated following a downsizing implementation. Cascio (1993) expressed concerns about the potential consequences of downsizing, explaining why manufacturing performance usually deteriorates:

- there is a lack of policies or programmes, for example, employee retraining or job redeployment
- once specialists are gone, operating managers may be expected to fill the void, needing to develop new skills
- survivors are stretched thin, they manage more people and jobs and work longer hours
- short-term decision-making is prioritised over long-term decision-making
- following a downsizing, surviving employees become narrow-minded, self-absorbed and risk averse and, as a consequence, morale sinks, productivity drops and survivors distrust the management.

It is perhaps worth pausing to consider too how applicable these “consequences of downsizing” are also often barriers to change in re-engineering any business.

In trying to find the answer to the question “what worked so well at Luton”, researchers were afforded total access to staff and management, with the added advantage that a member of the research team was also the lead communications advisor on the whole project from the beginning and also part of the core management team.

This gave unprecedented access to the real story behind the closure – and access to the best learning possible, before being able to go and study the early findings and refine further the conclusions.

3.3 Findings

An analysis of the information obtained through interviews, with both management and production personnel, resulted in the development of a process model that incorporated five, clearly distinguishable, management activities through the change of downsizing (Figure 3.1).

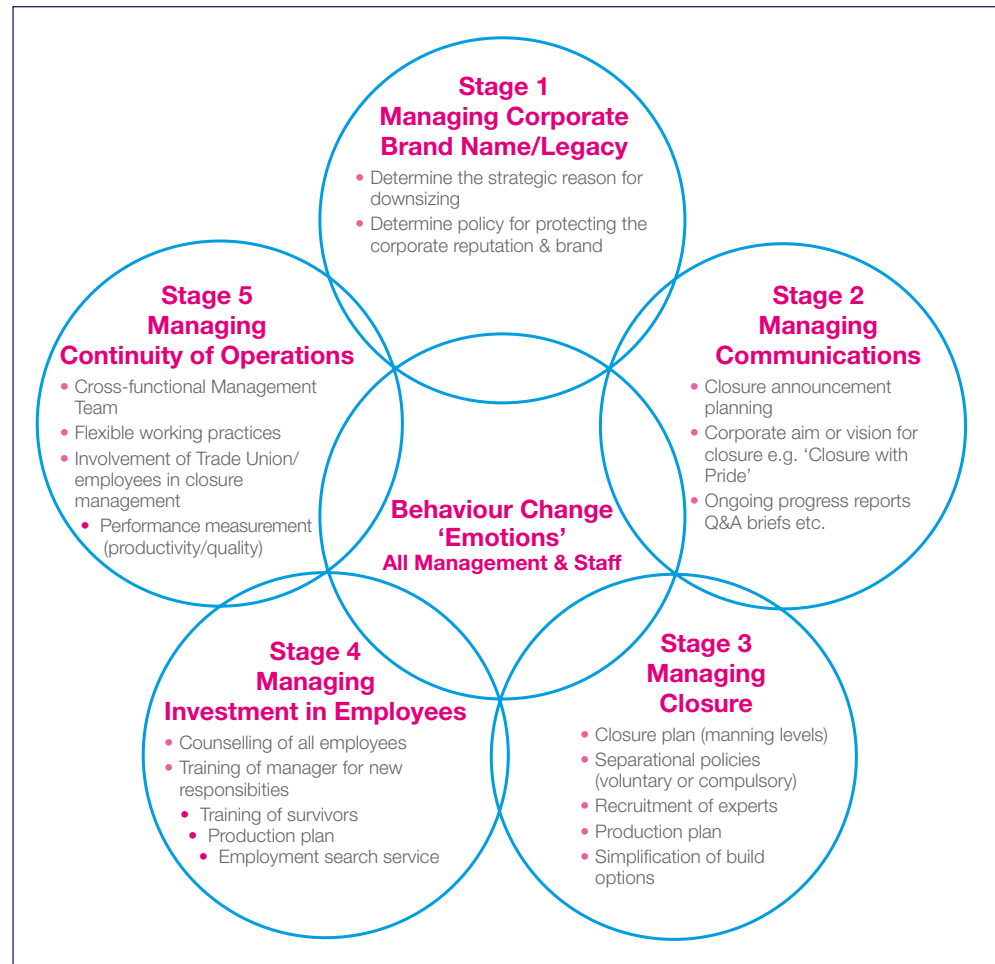


Figure 3.1 Model of facility closure management

Central to the model above are the management of individuals' change in behaviour and the recognition of the huge emotional impact that an announcement of the closure of an entire plant can generate. This became apparent in the research because of the frequent reference to the "grief" reported to have been exhibited by many individuals following the announcement of the plant closure. As the Plant Director said at the time: *"People are going to get angry and they need to be able to move through that emotion cycle, just like you go through a grieving process. It takes time to go through that."*

As a consequence, these reflections were considered to connect with the 1970 classic Kubler-Ross explanation of the "Bereavement Process" (Kübler-Ross 1970). The emotional changes defined in this process were consistent with those that many of the employees reported to have experienced following the announcement that the factory was to be closed. An adaptation of the Kubler-Ross diagram of the "Bereavement Process" is shown in Figure 3.2 and will be discussed later.

The model of facility closure management has five key stages.

Stage 1 – Managing corporate brand name/legacy

Within Stage 1 there are two key issues. The first is making the core management decision to downsize an operation. Those affected by this decision must be totally convinced of its legitimacy and need. The second is the need to formulate a communications plan to protect the corporate reputation and brand, as the wider business must continue to run throughout the change. Negative publicity attached to the overall brand through coverage of a change or downsizing can quickly hit consumer confidence and hence footfall in showrooms or stores, and hence vital revenue need to run the business. This is regardless of any internal communications fall out resulting in loss in productivity elsewhere in the business.

During Stage 1 at Luton a “Kitchen Cabinet” was formed consisting of the Managing Director, the Site Director, the Communications and Personnel Managers and an Advisor from the Corporate Legal Department. And they led the change programme with both a business and pragmatic approach – always ready to adapt and change: keeping decision making quick, focused and united.

Stage 2 – Managing communications

This Kitchen Cabinet was also responsible for the management of the three key issues that constituted the communications strategy. The first is closure announcement planning.

The initial announcement planning process must be defined in terms of how all the key stakeholders will be informed about closure and timings for the release of the information. The second is the corporate aim or vision for closure, in this case study this was defined as “Closure with Pride”. The third was the provision of consistent, clear, communications so everyone understood how the management and practical process of closure was being carried out.

All of the communications process required defined gateways for communications releases throughout the process, running alongside the business plan, using appropriate channels to communicate – something that becomes ever more difficult to control in the world of Twitter and other social media sites competing alongside recognised traditional channels such as the professional media or established internal communications.

Stage 3 – Managing closure

Within Stage 3 there are five key issues. The first is developing a production output plan that defines future employment levels during the run-down of operations.

The second is separation policies that may either be voluntary or compulsory. The significance of this choice will need to be assessed in terms of its impact upon the ability to retain those employees preferred for the run-down of production.

The third is recruitment of experts. These are professionals who have knowledge and experience of factory closure management.

The fourth is the development of a production capacities plan for the running down of operations during the period from closure announcement to final closure.

The fifth and last is the aim of simplifying the production process wherever possible.

Stage 4 – Managing investment in employees

Within Stage 4 there are four key issues. The first is counselling of all employees, the second is the training of managers for new responsibilities. Third, training those who are remaining within the organisation (the “survivors”), and fourth, is the provision of aid to help the job search for those to be made redundant.

Stage 5 – Managing continuity of operations

Within Stage 5 there are four key facility closure management tasks. The first is the creation of a multi-functional leadership team, second the agreement with the unions and workforce to increase employee flexibility and versatility, and third is the active involvement of the Trade Unions and employees in managing the closure day to day.

3.4 Behavioural change – the transition curve

If the Bereavement Process described earlier is used as a guide to the emotional reactions of the employees of the Luton plant following its announced closure, then investment in people is a means for helping them to come to terms with such an unexpected corporate management decision.

The researchers then matched the facility closure management model to a transition curve to illustrate the overall cycle of learning and benefits (Figure 3.2).

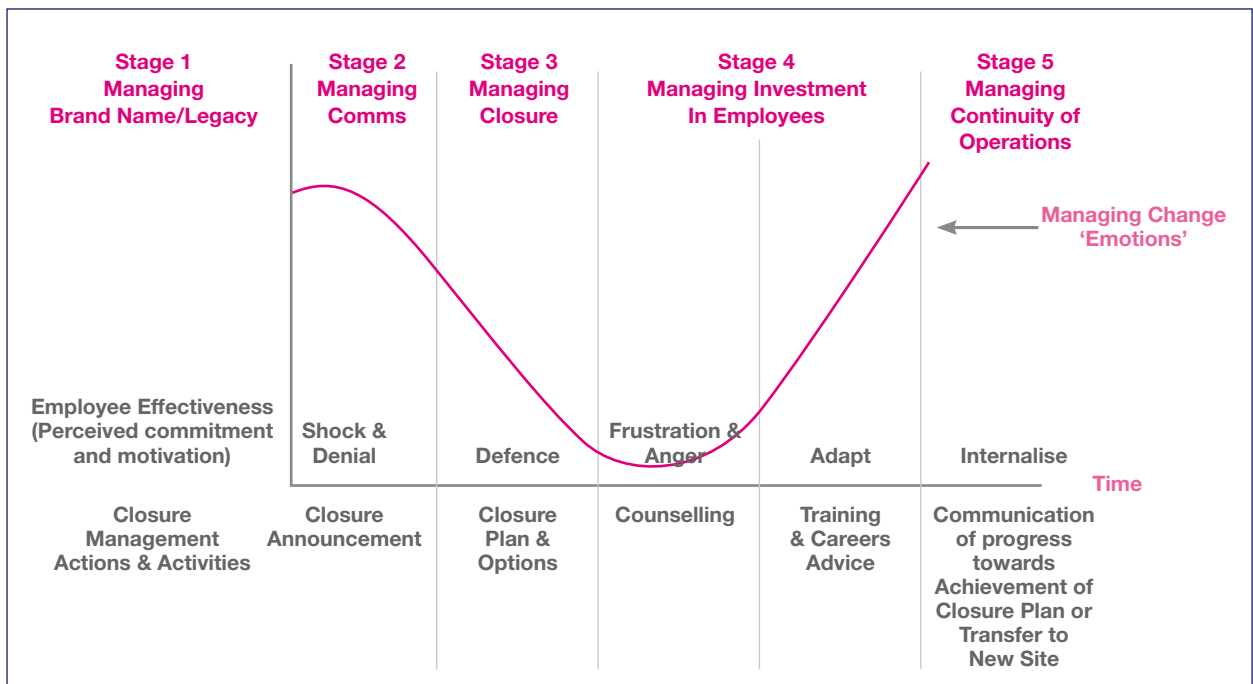


Figure 3.2 Linking the model for facility closure management to the transition curve

At the top are the five stages of the facility closure management model. The five types of emotions felt, during a traumatic experience such as bereavement, are listed at the centre, and at the bottom are the actions taken following the closure announcement to address the negative consequences of these emotions.

Whilst not every employee will react in exactly the same way, or be at the same point in the curve, the researchers failed to find any employee, including the senior management, who would not admit to having gone through all the emotions on the curve at some stage during the process.

3.5 So what is the learning from all this?

First and foremost, that staff, their family and friends, can be capable of the most extraordinary performance and behaviour in the face of devastatingly bad news for their futures.

That managers and leaders, if they put their staff at the forefront of their minds – remembering to be empathic and consistent in messaging and behaviours – can not only take their staff with them, but can improve performance and generate a real sense of pride through adversity.

And finally that no one function in an organisation can deliver on its own. Human Resources is nothing without consistent production management operations to provide a bedrock of security for staff; communications as a function cannot sit outside of a business, it must have a seat at the table working in partnership with the other leaders.

Returning finally to the transferability of this model of thinking – is the learning from this work on downsizing, in fact, any different from what should be best practice in any form of organisational change programme. You cannot run your business without motivated people, and running the business as a leader is what you are there to do.

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Michael is Reader in Transformational Change, Director of the DBA (Doctor of Business Administration) Programme and Founder/Director of The TRANSFORMATION Project at Aston Business School. His research interests focus on change management, specifically, adapting promising management practices to enhance performance across varied organisational contexts, contributing to ideas about receptivity for change, knowledge exchange and project-based organisations.

As Director of The TRANSFORMATION Project, he is involved in the translation of existing academic theory into practitioner management tools and in their application. From his international research, he has developed the Butler Receptivity for Change Model. The five factor model reveals what makes organisations high performing. An early adopter of the Model was the OECD which analysed six EU governments to explore the management of change produced by major reform initiatives (translated into Chinese). The Model is currently being applied across sectors (private, public and NGO) both in the UK and internationally.

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Prior to joining Cranfield, his initial employment was in production engineering in the British Motor Industry. After studying for a Masters degree at Bath University he was appointed to senior management positions in research and software development organisations and held both line and project management responsibilities. During this time he was responsible for leading the development of systems for design, manufacturing and management purposes.

Michael was previously the Director of the UK Best Factory Awards scheme and is currently a member of its judging panel.

Authors' Note: For a full description of the research methods that were used and more details about the literature reviewed, see:

Butler MJR, Sweeney M and Crundwell D (2009), "Facility Closure Management – The Case of Vauxhall Motors Luton", *International Journal of Operations and Production Management*, 29:7, pp 670-691.

The authors are keen to exchange ideas with readers and are looking for other case study organisations to test the ideas further.

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Article 4

Delivering practice based stories of small and medium enterprise

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September 2011

4.1 Introduction

Traditionally delivering academic input to members of the small and medium enterprise community can be problematic because the material is often considered too theoretical or is skewed towards delivery to post graduate or paying corporate clients who dictate the curricula. This practice based article discusses an innovative, funded course, “Going for Growth”, delivered to small business people using complementary practice based stories.

“Storytelling has particular value in business classrooms as an integrative tool; a good story helps students understand the link between classroom theory and practical business outcomes”. (Morgan and Dennehy 1995: 60)

This article examines practice based stories as a sub-genre of “Organisational Tales”. Boje (1991) defines an organisational story as “a tale about a person caught in one situation unfolding from start to climax to resolution”, thus small and family business stories can legitimately be regarded as organisational stories.

As a field of study, organisational storytelling is well established in management studies – particularly the link between storytelling and success in corporate settings . However, from an academic perspective, the study of “Organisational Stories” (Boje 1991) relating to small and family businesses is in its infancy, albeit a trickle of articles continue to appear in various journals across the broad spectrum of management studies. A recurrent theme in such studies is that of organisational learning. It is of note that from a practitioner perspective, organisational storytelling is also used by consultants to teach business values and lessons (e.g. Narva 2011) because it serves a practical purpose in business. Family-controlled enterprises communicate their heritage across generations to create competitive advantage, thus families who tell and share stories are more likely to carry on their family’s heritage (Narva 2011). Nevertheless, Hamilton (2006) argues that narrative approaches remain under-utilised in family business research.

In particular, the article by Morgan and Dennehy (1995: 60) articulates how we as academics can harness the power of storytelling in the classroom. They propose that first of all we listen and try yourself (1995: 61-62). They suggest we go to storytelling performances, conferences and practice by asking relatives, friends and colleagues to tell us stories to clarify the “who, what, when, where, why and how” questions. Thereafter we should tell stories to students from the press, books, novels and personal experience. They further advocate reading stories out loud to build confidence. Once we as instructors or narrators are confident ourselves, the next step is to let students tell personal stories in pairs to create stories from past experience. They stipulate the importance of interjecting stories about role models. If time permits they suggest getting learners to gather stories themselves. However, how does one use stories in the classroom if the learner/classroom time is limited?

Consequentially, this article presents an overview of an innovative, purpose designed course for members of the small business community, delivered as part of the ESF (European Social Fund) funded “Going for Growth” seminar series at Aberdeen Business School, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland between 2009 and 2012. In particular, it considers material delivered during sessions on business growth delivered by the author Robert Smith. The course was designed around research which identified the stated needs of the small business community. A typical class comprised of approximately 20 SME learners of mixed business experience and sometimes employees. This can be problematic from a pedagogical perspective because it means that there are mixed learning needs and educational attainment levels. One delegate may have a degree and another may not, making practice based material preferable. This article concentrates on learning issues in tailoring and delivering the material and in particular on developing practice based stories.

4.2 Developing practice based stories

In the Business School environment, the default teaching style is didactic and transmissive (Fry, Ketteridge and Marshall 1981; Brown 2004; Biggs and Tang 2007). Although this suffices for under graduate lectures it is not ideal for non academic adult learning scenarios. We were also mindful of the need to cater for individual learning needs (Kolb 1981; Race 2005). Race (2005) advises that the facilitator must make the material accessible to students with different learning styles. Initially, we decided to approach the challenge using the traditional approach to delivering learning by delivering a standard lecture, albeit tailored more towards the small business practitioners, using material from classic texts such as Burns and Dewhurst (1989), Cromie (1991), Storey (1994), Stokes (1995), Timmons (1999), Chaston (2000), Burns (2001/2007), and Katz (2008).

However, the existing literature on business growth is skewed towards the larger SME. This is important because, from a pedagogical perspective, teaching issues surrounding growth in a small business context can be problematic in that many of the issues surrounding growth are industry and sector specific. The problems faced by a small business owner with one employee will differ from those of another owner with 150 employees. This was the case faced by the authors. The first session was skewed towards the theoretical and as a result of delegate feedback the later sessions were redesigned to incorporate practice-based delivery through storytelling and by adding participative voices whilst self-generating learning context.

In redesigning the input to cover theory and a variety of practical exercises a major problem was to contextualise the input in order to make it relevant to the local context because many of the available teaching cases were North American in origin (such as Koehn 2001; Kuratko and Welsch 2004) and not suitable for the series of one-off events. A variety of inputs based upon material and examples from existing textbooks were considered but dismissed as being too academic and too theoretical for business owners attending an evening event after a hard day at the office. It was essential to make the events interactive and stories appeared to have much to offer. However, from personal experience of using case studies we were aware that many of the more worthwhile cases are information rich and require pre-event reading. Even when engaged in full time education, many students do not conduct the reading and therefore often cannot participate in the case study tutorial experience. When there is limited time available a case study can be overwhelming and too time consuming. There is a danger that the planned activity can fall flat.

The quest to meet learners' needs saw the traditional lecture-style, PowerPoint presentation replaced with learner orientated, interactive teaching in which practice based stories played a major part. The theoretical input was reduced to a twenty minute PowerPoint presentation and the use of practice based stories allowed the learners to work in groups to contextualise and consolidate their learning in terms of their own level of experience. To inject interactivity into the sessions the author penned a number of practice based stories. See Case Study below for an illustrative example which relates to the positive strategies adopted by an Aberdeen based-independent entrepreneur in the financial services industry. A decision was taken to concentrate upon the personal issues and choices faced by the business owners. Collectively, the authored stories also illustrate some of the more popular growth theories and were intended to illustrate the human and emotional elements of working through the recession. They embed the theory in a localised British context which is important.

Case Study: A planned strategy for growth – ‘One day the telephone just stopped ringing’

Adam is a self-employed financial advisor/consultant in his early forties. He is affiliated to a larger consultancy firm based in Aberdeen. Adam has been in this business for the past ten years and it has provided Adam and his young family with a comfortable life style. He works from home and operates very much like an independent entrepreneur in that he is responsible for generating his own leads and developing these into sales for which he is paid commission. The finalisation of a deal is often dependent upon Adam’s communication skills. As a result, life for Adam was busy but good.

The independence offered by his choice of business activity was a major deciding factor in his career choice. The flexibility of the hours worked was a positive factor. Adam could choose to work when it suited him. This allowed him quality time with his family and his children. The drawbacks were working evenings to see clients too busy to see him during the working day. Adam would often take care of paperwork and administration late into the night. Prior to the current recession hitting the North-East of Scotland in late 2008 – early 2009 most of Adam’s work was conducted in the property market and entailed mortgage and remortgaging work. Indeed, 80 per cent of his work consisted of mortgage work. The remainder of his work related to advising clients on financial investments such as PEPS and ISAs. In effect Adam was positioned to service affluent middle class professionals. He also advises a number of small businessmen in the Aberdeen area on their personal financial portfolios. During the decade prior to the current recession work was steady and increased annually. This resulted in a predictable pattern of monthly commission payments from which he could plan his own finances.

The years 2005 to 2008 proved to be particularly lucrative because of the property boom in Aberdeen and parts of Aberdeenshire. It was not unusual for Adam to close 10-20 mortgage deals in a month. Also Adam could afford to be selective and pick the clients which would provide him with the best returns on his time. The telephone in his home office study was a constant but comfortable interruption to family life. During the first half of 2008 business was booming even during the traditionally quieter months of January and February. Activity peaked during the Summer and late Autumn but began to tail off as the Winter months came round. Adam noticed that the number of calls for advice received began to slow down the nearer it got to Christmas. It was during this time that the news of the recession and the American sub-prime market problems were reported. The problem seemed a long way off but it was not because it coincided with a discernible lull in the Aberdeen property bubble. Houses and flats which once sold within a few weeks remained unsold and potential buyers were inclined to be cautious. Adam and his family enjoyed a well earned festive break and in the second week of January 2009 he began to look forward to work again. Things were slow and by the end of the month Adam realised that one day “the telephone in his office had stopped ringing”. This had never happened before and the news was bleak as local builders stopped building projects and the banks stopped lending to first time buyers.

Things did not improve by February, in fact they worsened. The office phone remained silent. Adam checked with his peer group and established that he was not alone. In February 2008 Adam had closed over 20 mortgage applications but in February 2009 he only closed one. Adam took stock of the situation and decided to be proactive. He began to canvass clients from his data base and for the first time in many years had to cold call clients. Slowly this paid off because he listened to their financial needs and sold them appropriate financial products. He increased his networking activity and listened to the problems of other businessmen and financial consultants. This enabled him to pursue potential lines of new business. He has increased his ‘golfing’ commitments because these often result in networking opportunities with potential clients.

In addition, he conducted an audit of his skills/knowledge base and as a result he decided to reposition his work load and effort. After researching the market he moved into advising on tax minimisation, the avoidance of inheritance tax and debt management. This line of work was more time consuming and demanding and it was a steep learning curve. Nevertheless, it paid the household bills and kept him afloat. Moreover, he took stock of his monthly commitments and reduced and streamlined unnecessary expenditure. He is more conscious of closing deals and receiving payment on time. Adam now uses his time more wisely and enjoys more family time. In his down time he also studied the stock market and was prepared to take a risk. He has self taught himself brokering skills and despite shouldering significant initial losses he is operating at a profit in his new hobby. Whilst Adam has not reached the level of activity he enjoyed prior to the recession he has succeeded in being happy with his lot and has learned new skills and increased his stock of knowledge in respect of financial investment opportunities.

4.3 Working with practice based stories

Authoring the narratives helped develop theory into practice. The iterative process involved in developing the material demonstrated evidence of linking theory and practice whilst engaging with relevant literature to inform developing arguments linked to a “continuous quality improvement cycle” of plan, do, assess and implement as advocated by Langley et al (1996). The practice based stories were presented to the small business owners who were asked to work in pairs with another class member from a different sector of small business to maximise the learning impact. They were asked to select a story and given time to read it. The learners were then asked to identify learning points from their reading such as identifying the strategies used to grow business out of recession. They were encouraged to list and discuss these in the context of their own business experience and consider whether these could work for them and what they would do if the telephone stopped ringing. Additionally, they were encouraged to comment on any ways in which they could improve post recession performance – and to improvise by adding their own stories. The purpose of such practice based stories is to demonstrate alternative strategies of diversification available to small businessmen.

4.4 Reflecting on delivering and learning from experience

This section provides a reflection on practical aspects of using practice based stories in the classroom. A valuable lesson learned was that it was important to prepare the classroom correctly to encourage a storytelling environment because the students, being a mixture of small business owners, their staff and third sector workers, can be a difficult audience to please. It is best to avoid the appearance of the traditional classroom and hold sessions in a breakout room. Using stories is appropriate because it makes allowance for learners who are late and miss the theoretical underpinning embedded in the PowerPoint lecture and because stories allow us to be less theoretical and more engaging.

Using stories in the classroom allows the lecturer and audience to co-author the script (Ellis and Bochner 2006). The narrative based practical activity permits the learners to engage with the material and contribute using their collective experience by swapping stories. Stories and storytelling help us develop emotional literacy, make sense of our world and appreciate different points of view. They encourage social and thinking skills. From a pedagogical perspective, stories engender group cohesion and influence group dynamics making learning fun and reflexive (Fox-Eades 2006). They also encourage the generation of inter-group activity. As a result, the learners all made links between the theoretical input and their practical experience. The activities created a genuine buzz and when the groups were asked to feedback to each other in relation to the narratives they identified common themes across the practice based stories and suggested solutions based on experience. The groups all identified with the subjects of the stories and the issues resonated with them providing material for extended discussions. The storytelling worked well within the restricted time frame. The stories were evaluated as being an enjoyable and worthwhile activity in the course feedback forms. This is not surprising given that as lecturers we know that students prefer stories to theory.

As an extracurricular activity the learners were set the challenge of trying to author a case study based on the issues surrounding their business growth problems. This challenge engendered a very real and palpable sense of the worth of the activity and the majority of the business owners agreed that the writing up of a case study of their business would be a useful tool to help focus their minds on the lesson learned. In addition, the learners were provided with a reference list in relation to conducting self study on growth problems in small business.

4.5 Developing story telling as a pedagogical tool

Formal contemporary education is predicated on the pedagogy of learning by design. This approach to learning presupposes the use of systematic instruction and often exclusively dominated by the transmission of information (usually theory laden) and text based technologies. This form of learning may not be suitable for individuals who have preference for an informal and practical (e.g. work based) approach to learning. Learning is a social activity which involves interaction through talk, discussion, negotiating and meaning

making. Folklore or stories (storytelling and re-storying) as a form of pedagogy of teaching and learning is rooted in an educational framework. As Bruner (1996) posits, stories help make meaning out of experience and help make connections with prior knowledge and experience. The narrative aspect of storytelling involves sharing of a personal account or experience and relevant lesson learned. In learning, the stories are told with a purpose of helping others to connect to the common experience through re-interpreting the story and to enable them make sense and meaning of the everyday activities of small business.

Stories empower learners to demonstrate their understanding of: principles, concepts and theories; to express ideas, thoughts, creativity and imagination; to explore how theory links to practice; to reflect and be reflexive (Atherton 2010, Lowenthal 2008). Moreover, stories are memorable, multilayered, compelling and contextual (Atherton 2010). Through use of stories in the delivery of the course, participants became co-creators of the curriculum as their stories formed the content on which discussions, analysis and the building of theory was based. They engaged in a process of “Knowing through narratives” (Burnett 2010).

Practice based stories facilitate learning by making the complex simple. Learning is a complex process and is about how an individual comes to know (and becomes knowledgeable about things). This involves a range of actions – observing, experiencing, abstracting, application (doing), evaluating, reflecting and so on. There are different ways of knowing and knowing may be acquired or achieved through formal or informal learning. The activities discussed herein work because they engage with the personal and emotional issues surrounding growth in the small business sector (Flamholtz and Randle 2000). Practice based narrative activities can be used as teaching cases and are easy to write. This article provides direction to other academics and practitioners considering using practice based stories in a classroom setting.

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Rob Smith is a Reader in Entrepreneurship at Aberdeen Business School and is the Scottish Institute for Policing (SIPR) lecturer in leadership. As such, he pursues joint research interests in police related subjects as well as maintaining an entrepreneurship output. He is a former Constable with Grampian Police.

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Article 5

Against the tyranny of PowerPoint: technology-in-use and technology abuse

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5.1 Introduction

One of the technologies that have woven themselves into today's communication processes is PowerPoint. Like email about 10 years earlier, PowerPoint may initially have given the appearance of accomplishing what earlier technologies did (overhead transparencies, slides, chalk and blackboard) only more efficiently, more stylishly. In this sense, it could be seen as an instance of straightforward automation (Zuboff 1985, 1988). Yet, just as email redefined the nature of organisational communication, PowerPoint is having some far-reaching consequences. It directly affects presentations in business, academia and, as illustrated by Al Gore's widely publicised presentation on global warming, public debate. Even more substantially, however, it is capable of redefining organisational knowledge, spawning new genres of communication (Kaplan 2006; Orlikowski and Yates 1994; Yates and Orlikowski 1992) and legitimising new forms of knowing.

In business and government, lengthy reports are supplanted by printouts of transparencies while, in higher education, PowerPoint has become the sine qua non of the lecture, a piece of technology that both supports and defines classroom practices (Orlikowski et al. 1995; Orlikowski 1992). Thus, the nature of 'presentation', 'lecture' and possibly of 'learning' itself are being irreversibly altered; some indeed may say 'reinvented'. This paper lies at the intersection of discourses on organisational technologies-in-use and critical pedagogy. It examines PowerPoint as a piece of technology-in-use that both constrains and enables its users. My own focus is on its educational and academic applications, although its ramifications for business applications are also coming to be recognised (Doumont 2005; Kaplan 2006; Karreman and Strannegard 2004; Yates and Orlikowski forthcoming).

Like many new technologies and new genres, much of the debate on PowerPoint has elicited strong criticisms and enthusiastic endorsements. The paper examines some of these with references to my own experiences. More significantly, however, it seeks to elucidate how this particular technology is adapted, modified and subverted in the course of its organisational implementations. Further, it seeks to offer an analysis of the effects of such technology on the construction and dissemination of organisational knowledge. More widely, the paper argues that PowerPoint is a technology well suited to the practices of a society of spectacle, where much knowledge and information assume the form of visual representations, such as photographs, images, graphs and diagrams. In this sense, the paper shares the reservations of some commentators regarding the damage it can inflict on the skills of reasoning, and identifies some of its shortcomings when it is used in a routine, passive and predictable manner.

The paper, however, also identifies some uses of PowerPoint that go beyond narrow performativity (Lyotard 1984/1991) and uncritical learning. I argue that it can then become a platform for passionate, discovery learning (Gherardi 1999, 2004), a medium that, far from closing discursive avenues, enables individuals and groups to discover a voice and develop their learning and communication potential. Like other forms of technology, the uses and meanings of PowerPoint are not tyrannically dictated by its designers but emerge in its enactment by different social actors in different contexts (Orlikowski 2000).

I conclude that, when used creatively, PowerPoint, instead of destroying old skills of arguing, theorising and communicating, can generate new learning opportunities entailing discovery, criticism and plurivocality. I argue that creative users of PowerPoint display many of the qualities of bricolage and improvisation that have long been associated with narrative knowledge (Gabriel 2002; Lévi-Strauss 1966; Linstead and Grafton-Small 1992;

Weick 1993). Used in this way, PowerPoint does not simplify, codify and objectify knowledge but becomes part of a multi-level engagement with organisational complexity (Tsoukas and Hatch 2001).

5.2 Brief overview of the development of PowerPoint

PowerPoint developed from an earlier piece of software, initially created for the Apple Macintosh II, called Presenter. It was purchased on the year of its release by Microsoft for a relatively small sum, rebranded and developed as a simple-to-use instrument mainly for business presentations. In the latter part of the 1990s it became part of the suite of programmes that made up Microsoft Office and in a short period of time established itself as the indispensable medium for business presentations.

The concurrent development of email and the internet ensured that PowerPoint slides could be easily communicated to wide audiences, packing a lot of information into what seemed like an aesthetically pleasing and synoptic style. Instead of having to plough through lengthy reports, busy businesspeople could quickly skim through a few transparencies and absorb the essential features of a case or an argument. Very rapidly, with the addition of animations, sound effects and graphics, PowerPoint presentations also become corporate style statements – expressing corporate values, such as ‘modernity’, innovativeness and so forth.

The incursion of PowerPoint in education was almost as rapid as it was in business, even if the reasons behind it were not identical. Its uses can be viewed as symptomatic of some long-term changes in teaching and learning technologies. These coincide with a changing range of demands on academics and increasingly consumerist attitudes of many learners. Many teachers, under great time pressures to deliver on research and administration, under constant email bombardment, and faced with pressing deadlines and obligations, sought a way of rationalising and simplifying their teaching by embracing PowerPoint as a way of streamlining lecture preparation and delivery.

Many publishers quickly realised the possibility of profits from this market and considerably offered ready-made slides, initially on stencils and later online and on CD-ROMs, for lecturers to incorporate into their teaching programmes. Many lecturers, to their delight, discovered that teaching scores and student satisfaction improved with the use of PowerPoint. Gradually audiences, both in lectures and in academic conferences, have come to expect and even demand PowerPoint as an indispensable feature of presentations.

In my experience, students in business, management and the social sciences, once they had tasted the delights of PowerPoint, were unwilling to give them up. In spite of wide cultural differences, diverse learning styles and other preferences, these students, in a very short period of time, came to view PowerPoint as a totally indispensable accoutrement to the lecture. Increasingly they demanded the lecturer hand out the slides before the lecture, and a new form of note-taking prevailed in the lecture theatre, that of adding comments on copies of the slides. On many courses today, including some taught by the author, lecturers are expected to hand out the PowerPoint of an entire course at the start of a semester.

5.3 Some criticisms

We may caricature the new form of lecture as one of students engaged in one of the favourite pastimes of our age, watching pictures and absorbing largely subliminal messages. As consumers of educational packages, they extended their experience of being consumers of shows and spectacles, on and off TV. This can all be seen as part of the widely debated commercialisation of higher education, which turns students into customers and universities into ‘McUniversities’ (De Vita and Case 2003; Gabriel 2005b; Gould 2003; Ohmann 2003; Parker and Jary 1995; Ritzer 1999; Sturdy and Gabriel 2000; Washburn 2004). Education then could be seen as coming close to entertainment (some call it ‘infotainment’), with bite-size morsels of information that do not strain or test their powers of reasoning or comprehension beyond supplying enough material for some largely ritual testing to take place.

In line with Karreman's and Strannegard's (2004) powerful critique of its business uses, we could then observe that PowerPoint in the classroom can reduce the students' critical awareness, naturalise knowledge into seemingly indisputable bullet points and bolster the authority of the lecturer whom it surreptitiously transforms into a salesperson (see also Sturdy and Gabriel 2000). At the same time, PowerPoint can substantially limit a lecturer's ability to deviate from a preconceived lecture plan, improvise or develop a new line of thinking in the course of a lecture. Like a set of rails fixed on the ground, PowerPoint slides lock the thinking process along a single linear path, blocking impromptu variations and digressions; in short, improvisation and exploration

But criticisms of PowerPoint run even deeper. In the last few years, a lively debate has grown around its uses, mostly conducted on websites, prompted by a stinging critique by Edward Tufte, a Yale professor of information design (Tufte 2003a,c). Tufte charged PowerPoint with degrading the quality of communication, stupefying and boring audiences and debasing everything it touches. Critics have held PowerPoint responsible not only for spiritual and cognitive debasement but for material disasters too (Felder and Brent 2005). Tufte (2003b), for instance, argued that the Columbia space shuttle disaster might have been averted had the crucial information regarding the foam, which critically damaged the shuttle's tiles, not been contained in a confusing PowerPoint slide with 10 bullet points at six levels. Tufte's argument is that the vital piece of information that would have alerted NASA to the damage sustained by the shuttle was drowned by information overload, noise and absence of context, which were the result of a PowerPoint mindset (See also Rosen 2005).

5.4 And some defences

Tufte's lampooning of PowerPoint ('Power corrupts, PowerPoint corrupts absolutely') has earned him some notoriety and fame. Yet, similar charges can, after all, be raised against virtually any form of information technology. Typewriters destroyed the skills of calligraphy, word processors destroyed the skill of producing well-turned phrases, and the internet has allowed every type of uncensored and unauthorised text to claim an audience.

Is one to judge a new technology purely by its negative consequences? Defenders of PowerPoint have pointed out that many of the shortcomings of PowerPoint result from poor usage rather than the technology itself, and claim that one cannot blame PowerPoint for every problem of our educational systems (Abernathy 1999; Griffin 2003). Some educationists have produced evidence from schools indicating that PowerPoint helps pupils absorb information and that it enhances their concentration and motivation to learn (Bartsch and Cobern 2003; Boylan 2004; Doumont 2005; Hu et al. 2003; Susskind 2005).

Such defences are essentially utilitarian – PowerPoint, may not excite the students or stimulate their thirst for knowledge, but it makes the job of teachers in the classroom easier in keeping the attention of the children, helping to maintain their interest and helping them to assimilate the material. But PowerPoint has also been defended on artistic and aesthetic grounds, such as by artist and musician David Byrne:

"Although I began by making fun of the medium, I soon realised I could actually create things that were beautiful. I could bend the program to my own whim and use it as an artistic agent. The pieces became like short films: Some were sweet, some were scary, and some were mysterious. I discovered that even without text, I could make works that were 'about' something, something beyond themselves, and that they could even have emotional resonance. What had I stumbled upon? Surely some techie or computer artist was already using this dumb program as an artistic medium. I couldn't really have this territory all to myself – or could I?" (Wired Magazine, 11 September 2003: <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.09/ppt1.html>)

By using PowerPoint as a vehicle of expression, displaying collages, unpredictable juxtapositions of objects or subversions of conventional images, Byrne demonstrated that

this most 'straight' and conventional business technology could hold artistic and subversive possibilities. He showed that users display considerable ingenuity in creating new uses and new meanings for technological artefacts, discovering new contexts for them and, even, revealing subversive and ironic potentials that had never figured in the plan of the designers. Uses of this technology then could be viewed as discontinuous and episodic (Tyre and Orlikowski 1996) rather than standardised and routine; active and creative rather than passive and habitual.

5.5 A Personal illustration: my own experience of PowerPoint

In an attempt to examine the different ways in which PowerPoint may be used in higher education, I offer an illustration from my personal experience, which charts my development from reluctant user, to enthusiast, to sceptic, to qualified supporter. This is, of course, only one academic's experience with one piece of new technology. It does, however, suggest a considerable diversity of uses, attitudes, perceived risks and opportunities. I first encountered PowerPoint at the inaugural lecture of a colleague in 1997. My then university had just acquired the technology and it was clear that they viewed it initially as a fixture for 'special occasions' rather than as a soon-to-be-routine piece of educational technology.

The lecturer used it competently and the audience seemed to appreciate the interesting pictures he showed. The lecturer's apparent power to invoke a new, unexpected and immense range of images at the mere click of a mouse seemed impressive. The content of the lecture was less so. Certainly, the comparison of PowerPoint with the older technology of displaying images using a carousel slide projector, which frequently jammed and got out of focus, highlighted the advantages of the new technology. Several more inaugural lectures followed, making ever more sophisticated use of the PowerPoint, before I encountered it in a normal classroom.

During its early years, PowerPoint, in my range of familiarities, signified firmly 'special occasion'. I used PowerPoint for the first time in 2001 in a presentation at a workshop organised by the World Advertising Research Council, a grand name for an organisation running routine courses and workshops for advertising executives. I had been asked to make sure that the organisers had my slides before the actual presentation. I obtained a manual and (in my usual manner) followed the basic steps for creating a presentation on PowerPoint. Revisiting the presentation now, it seems competent and straightforward: 13 slides, nearly all involving a heading and a list of bullets. The preparation of the slides had seemed remarkably easy. I was the first presenter on the day of the workshop and recollect using the technology with easy confidence.

My topic was 'The consumer's many faces' – at that stage, I was not tempted to demonstrate the different faces of the consumer with images or pictures. I recollect staying for the next presentation and being impressed by the highly sophisticated graphics, pictures and animations employed by that presenter. The topic of his talk was how to revive sales of a sagging brand of toilet paper and his presentation appeared to generate much more interest than mine.

My next direct experience of using PowerPoint was in my own inaugural lecture in March 2002. I was assigned a skilled secretary who helped me construct what felt like a cutting-edge presentation: 29 slides, all but seven including pictures, many quite provocative; some of them illustrated points I was making in the lecture with pictures, such as buildings, bridges or works of art, at times announcing an idea, at others being out of step with the text I was presenting.

The lecture remains vividly in my memory. Dressed in academic gown, standing at the lectern in a twilight zone, I had a strong sense of occasion. PowerPoint appeared to add to my authorial power, as if by pressing a button I could greatly enhance an argument I was putting forward. Maybe more so -- the image appeared to make my argument incontestable. I felt somewhat like an actor who has been accustomed to performing

without make-up, costume, lighting and sets for a lifetime and suddenly finds himself armed with such appurtenances.

My grip over the audience felt correspondingly magnified. Of course, inaugural lectures are celebrations of academic narcissism, but I was impressed with the ease with which PowerPoint became part of my vanity toolkit. In addition to 'special occasion', PowerPoint at that time came to signify 'sophisticated presenter' or at least 'competent lecturer'. One particular memory from my inaugural lecture has stayed with me. At one point in the talk, I sought to subvert Weber's great metaphor of the iron cage of rationality with my own metaphor of a glass cage to represent today's organisations.

Flashing images, first of an iron cage and subsequently of a glass cage, just before the words had been uttered, gave me a tremendous sense of power, the precise power expressed in the phrase 'A picture tells more than 10,000 words' (which incidentally became the title of a subsequent lecture). What would have taken painstaking efforts of reasoning and argumentation could be achieved with minimum of fuss and minimum of effort; and, possibly, to better effect. Subsequently, on rereading the text of my lecture, I was somewhat disappointed by the paucity of the analysis and the gaps in the reasoning. It took me three years to rethink it, rewrite it and publish it as an academic text that might be defended on its own merits.

Inspecting the contents of my computer, I observe that I subsequently used PowerPoint only once during that academic year, but from the following one (2003/2004) nearly all my class presentations have made use of it. I also notice that I did not use PowerPoint at any academic conference until 2004, but since then I have used it invariably (except in two places where the technology was unavailable, much to the bemusement of most delegates).

Have I become a PowerPoint 'junkie'? Maybe, and maybe, like a junkie, I know that my addiction is not good for me. Using PowerPoint continues to give me a sense of control over the audience, a magic instrument with which occasionally to seduce them or at least to tranquilise them. I undoubtedly feel anxious prior to a presentation lest the technology should malfunction. Before lecturing in a new environment, I seek to familiarise myself with the technology and ensure it functions properly. My skills at preparing the transparencies and at using the technology in the classroom have improved greatly. The feeling of security afforded by a well-prepared set of slides is immense. It is probably true to say that students making classroom presentations adopted it before their lecturers, and that they have consistently employed more sophisticated and imaginative graphics and animations than lecturers do. Its usefulness to students making presentations to peers or seniors is absolutely vital. Since 2002, I have hardly ever attended a student presentation, whether individual or group, that has not relied on PowerPoint.

It was during a PhD seminar I was facilitating that I observed what can happen when the technology fails. There were going to be three presentations by PhD students in front of an audience of about 10 of their peers. It was due to be held in a small seminar room, which, alone among such rooms, did not have dedicated computer facilities. A rash of activity ensued, seeking to fix the problem, but I announced that this would be a fine opportunity to try out some old-fashioned skills of presenting, debating and, above all, thinking. The result was one of the most creative, enjoyable and fecund seminars any of the participants had attended.

Several of the participants reported later that they had learned more from that session than most earlier ones. Yet, when I suggested that the following week's seminar should take place without PowerPoint, I was roundly out-argued by nearly all the participants. It was good to be able to pull it off once, but students did not like the idea of performing routinely without the safety net of the machine. From the following week, we were back to PowerPoint. It made me think of the satisfaction we get in the face of technological

adversity, as when a car, a television set or computer fails – we enjoy being able to acquit ourselves without but would not like to do without these conveniences on which we readily become dependent.

Over the last two years, I have become increasingly uncomfortable with PowerPoint. In my own practice, what struck me in the first instance was how much rarer had become the times when students asked probing questions that used to make me have to think, and how much easier it was to fob off potentially awkward questions by revisiting a slide and going through it again. My discomfort increased on realising how difficult it had become to vary the pace of the lecture, to digress from the structure of the presentation or to take those dangerous leaps into the unknown, while lecturing, where you have no specific landing spot in sight but trust yourself to discover one while you are in the air. I especially came to resent providing students with the slides in advance of lectures, when every attempt at surprise, disjuncture or humour was given away in advance. I had gradually come to value greatly two short courses I teach each year without PowerPoint, and even the occasional technical crash that forced me to revert to more traditional lecturing skills. My malaise about PowerPoint thus built up, leading possibly to the writing of this paper. My concern was that PowerPoint inevitably leads to comfortable, incontestable, uncritical, visually seductive and intellectually dulling communication.

One issue that I find especially troubling is that, in spite of all these reservations, I have continued using PowerPoint, viewing it as part of my 'professionalism'. This is especially the case when presenting to a business or mature audience. My felt need to use it is also more pressing when presenting to a large audience rather than a small one. Arriving for an important talk without my PowerPoint slides has started feeling like arriving naked. In a relatively short period of time, PowerPoint has moved from being a status symbol, a gadget or a resource to being an important and taken-for-granted part of my professional self or 'front', in Goffman's sense (1959, p.22). I have questioned numerous colleagues on their experiences with PowerPoint and have found them consistently similar to mine, though some have fewer reservations about using it than others. There are a few older ones who never made the transition to using it. An economics lecturer and close friend of mine confessed that he considered early retirement rather than be forced to use what he viewed as a deeply flawed communication technology. He said:

"For my entire life, I have delighted in lecturing, in developing my ideas in front of an audience, responding to their queries and concerns. Some of my happiest memories have been in discovering new ideas in the heat of performing in the classroom. Why should I change my ways, purely in response to pressures from students and administrators?"

Another friend of mine explained that, in his highly prestigious institution, only star performers teaching executive development programmes for which participants pay several thousand dollars each earn the right to teach without PowerPoint. Chief executives, he explained, do not attend courses in order to collect PowerPoint slides – they leave happy if they have got one or two good ideas or one or two good contacts.

5.6 Uses of Powerpoint in education

Reviewing my experience of PowerPoint, one of the most obvious, yet striking, things about it has been the precipitous increase of its use in classrooms as well as in academic conferences. For many situations today, it has come to be seen as totally indispensable. Yet, a mere five years ago its use in the lecture theatre and the conference hall was fairly limited. It was not until 2006 that the Academy of Management provided the necessary facilities at its annual conference. This increase is due to both 'pull' and 'push' factors – audiences, especially students, demand it, and lecturers find that it makes their lives easier. A useful study can be undertaken looking at the isomorphic diffusion of PowerPoint as an instance of management fad or technical innovation that confers legitimacy to its users (Abrahamson 1991; Spicer 2005; Sturdy 2004; Westphal et al. 1997) – my interest, however, lies more in the diversity of uses to which it is put and the way it shapes the contexts in which it embeds itself. The ubiquity of PowerPoint makes it easy to confirm that the competence

of users varies. We all have experience of presenters going ritually through their slides, determined to exhaust their stock in spite of the exasperation and boredom of their audiences. We also have experience of presenters who dazzle us with impressive graphics, leaving us in doubt as to whether it was all froth and no substance. Slides that seemed full of life and meaning in the lecture theatre turn out to be dull or dead when surveyed on paper the day after.

If competence varies across users, so too do the repertoires of applications to which PowerPoint is put (Ball and Wilson 2000; Orlikowski and Yates 1994). Some users rely on helpful or stimulating illustrations to liven up their argument; others may use bullet points to suggest an argument's basic structure; yet others may employ slides as a kind of hyper-text offering a commentary on their oral presentation. Styles in the use of PowerPoint vary – the number of slides and the speed at which they succeed each other, the nature and extent of the animations etc. Above all, the content of the slides and its relation to the oral presentation vary, reflecting each user's style and competence and the nature of the communication. The content of slides itself also varies, but much of it involves a) bullet-points lists, b) visual illustrations (schematic illustrations or photographic and other images) and c) statistical data, often in pie charts or other such forms (or a combination thereof). These categories, of course, overlap – lists can be presented as graphs and statistics as images (e.g. pie charts).

Lists

Lists of bullet points are the main format for presenting PowerPoint text, something reflected in all standard templates provided by the manufacturers. Lists have been the target of much criticism (see, for example, Feynman 2001). Lists imply certain assumptions that are not always met. For instance, many people (and most students) confronting a list will assume that it is exhaustive, that the items on it are co-equivalent (no list can be made of apples, dinosaurs and average rainfall in London) and that they are mutually exclusive (one cannot have in a list of Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn and Lower East Side). In reality, few lists meet these requirements, and yet they block thinking into precise areas of overlap or items that are absent from the list. Furthermore, lists obscure contexts and assume an unquestioned authority that conceals weaknesses in analysis, argument and structure.

As Karreman and Strannegard argue, bullet points confer a false authority on dubious knowledge, making it appear unavoidable and 'natural'; they appear to 'speak objective truths, undisputed wisdom and uncontested assumptions' (Karreman and Strannegard 2004: 9). This is supported by an experiment I tried out in my own practice as a lecturer, by randomly rearranging the bullet points on slides and then rearranging the slides in a presentation. To my surprise, it took minimum skill of improvisation to extemporise around the new spurious order and I doubt that anyone in the audience noticed. Such is the rhetorical power of a list of bullet points that huge inconsistencies and other flaws can easily be obscured. This false authority of bullet-point lists makes them a potentially disastrous device in education, dulling the critical faculties of students and offering bad lecturers a comfortable mantle of security.

Yet, not all lists are bad lists and not all audiences respond to them in a dull, uncritical manner. Lists have had their defenders. Feyerabend (1987), an enthusiast of argument if there was ever one, made a case that (properly constructed) lists are 'basic ingredients of common sense' and indeed early forms of theory. Thus, Aristotle made extensive use of lists in developing his theories, and some of his well-known works amount to little more than highly detailed (and carefully constructed) lists, which constituted essentially his lecture notes. Max Weber's tripartite theory of the legitimation of power, Burke's five key terms of dramaturgy, and Freud's three parts of the mental personality are all lists that act as the basis for theory. Numerous more examples could be offered.

But lists have other uses, beyond being potential building blocks of theory. One of these is to help us structure our thinking, even if poorly constructed lists act as substitutes for structure. As punctuation points in a presentation, they can enhance understanding and communicate reasoning structure from the presenter to the audience. Furthermore, lists have mnemonic and aesthetic qualities too. A well defined list, in its economy, completeness and originality, can afford much pleasure. A list that assumes a convenient acronymic quality (such as the four P's of marketing) installs itself easily in the memory. All in all then, in spite of serious potential pitfalls, lists can be useful cognitive and communicative devices. Like definitions, lists would ideally assume a provisional or working quality, inviting refinement and criticism and discarding when exhausted or fatally flawed.

Images

In spite of the importance of lists, it seems to me that the true blessing – and maybe the curse too – of PowerPoint is its ability to display images. By projecting pictures, the presenter can transport his or her audience to distant places, replacing the orderly setting of the lecture theatre with visions of exotic lands and unusual sights.

Ours is truly a society of visual representations, and PowerPoint can turn the modest, old-fashioned lecture into a real show, stimulating to the eye, entertaining and exciting. When presented with simultaneous audio and visual stimuli, our minds remain alert, seeking to establish the relation between sound and image, presented with countless instantaneous puzzles to prevent boredom from setting in. Sometimes, the image may reinforce the sound or vice versa. At other times, image and sound can work against each other or may produce entirely novel effects.

Like lists, pictures can have detrimental effects on learning. As I discovered on rereading my inaugural lecture, image can come to the rescue of poor argument, flawed structure and unreliable analysis. It also wrecks style, obliterating the finer nuances of language for the immediate bombardment of the senses. Like watching television, watching a sequence of vaguely attractive and undemanding images on a screen in a darkened room may induce a quasi-hypnotic state in the viewer, dulling his or her critical spirit and inquiring intelligence.

Yet, like bullet-point lists, images can be very useful devices in generating and disseminating knowledge. In some areas, like architecture, knowledge is vitally captured in visual representations that enable professionals to communicate with each other quickly and effectively. Much design work is carried out through images, sketches and drawings that embody and express ideas and innovations (Whyte and Ewenstein 2005). Photographs, drawings, sketches, graphs and computer printouts are all images, the commonest of which, as Elkins (1998, 1999) has shown, are hybrids of two or more such elements.

For certain types of knowledge transfer, such as explaining the functioning of the human heart or the construction of a new building, image is indispensable. In areas like anatomy, geography or physics, PowerPoint, with its use of images, often with three-dimensional graphics and infinite variation of nuance, magnification and colour, immeasurably enhances understanding and communication. Another type of image that features in PowerPoint presentations is the diagram, such as the schematic representation of material in 2 x 2 matrices, Venn diagrams and the like. These can relate large amounts of information in a relatively economical way, although, as in the case of lists, they may conceal many of the simplifying assumptions upon which they rest. Yet, like lists, diagrams can help both to structure our thinking process and to simplify mind-numbing complexity into something that we can understand and relate to. Diagrams can also afford some aesthetic pleasure in conveying information economically, wittily and elegantly. As with lists, therefore, while images can prove counter-productive in many respects, they also open up new possibilities of creative thinking, communication and learning. Like well-constructed lists, well-thought out, imaginative diagrams can be the basis on which theory and even entire domains of

knowledge, like business strategy, are based. In such domains, the visual representation can be as important an instrument of learning as the highly detailed argument (Porter 1985, 1991).

Statistics in PowerPoint often feature as graphs, pie charts and the like. These have been branded 'chartjunk' by Tufte (2003c), and admittedly they lack the rich informative detail and precise beauty of numbers. Yet, they can reveal relative proportions in a quick manner and maybe avert some of the misunderstandings that arise from miscounting the number of zeros at the end of numbers. Graphs, pie charts and other graphic representations of figures can generate misleading impressions, but so too can numerical data (Gould 1996; Holmes 1990).

More generally, it does not seem that charts have undermined the emphasis on measuring and quantification, in what Boyle (2000) calls the 'tyranny of numbers' and its social effect, the audit society (Power 1997); if anything, the graphical representation of statistics has enhanced the rhetorical force of numbers, by encouraging the construction of quasi-scientific league tables, rankings and so forth. In short, PowerPoint neither undermines the power of numbers and statistics, nor should it be viewed as responsible for bolstering it. As with the use of images, so too in the presentation of statistics, PowerPoint can present information in an economical, evocative and even aesthetic manner although, of course it does not always do so. It does not seem to me that PowerPoint by itself, and when properly used, substantially degrades the quality of statistical information conveyed.

All in all, it appears that PowerPoint encourages a certain linear form of reasoning that dislikes digression and has limited flexibility. Complex arguments can become simplified into bullet points and lists; fancy illustrations can conceal inadequate analysis or can create misleading impressions; pictures and images can easily turn a learning process into one of entertainment. Yet, some of the criticisms levelled at PowerPoint may be exaggerated or missing the point. In the first instance, some of the criticisms of PowerPoint are clearly aimed at poor uses of the technology – badly constructed lists, poorly presented statistics and facile illustrations. Secondly, some critics appear to be comparing a PowerPoint presentation (and sometimes a flawed one at that) with an 'ideal lecture situation', where an inspired lecturer improvises, discovers and illuminates. In reality, many routine lectures involve little improvisation, discovery or illumination, and many of the lecturer's 'inspired digressions' may be experienced by students as confusing, tedious and over-complicating the issues.

By contrast, a routine PowerPoint presentation may offer the kind of structure, simplification and support for argument through illustration that learners favour. Undoubtedly, it restrains and limits the lecturer's freedom, but this may not be unwelcome to confused and anxious students. When skilfully used, PowerPoint can offer certain advantages to teacher and learner, including a useful tool for summarising key points with mnemonic cues and lively visual supports that can embed learning. PowerPoint, then, offers some easy solutions to problems of presentation, which may not always be the optimal solutions, but they support communication and learning.

Critics may argue that certain technologies by themselves create bad habits. Routine use of PowerPoint can then be seen as creating linear, sequential, lazy thinking, and providing a security blanket for both incompetent presenters and insecure learners. It helps the former to camouflage shortcomings of analysis, thinking and critique through fancy graphics and compelling images. As a machine for packaging learning in standardised, digestible parcels, it helps the latter by confirming the view that all knowledge is 'stuff' assuming the form of bullet points. In this way, PowerPoint makes sensible discourse far easier – it smoothes out all the dangerous possibilities of misunderstanding, miscommunication etc. However, as Tyre and Orlikowski (1996) have argued, technologies in-use are adapted to different contexts not as a continuous, incremental way but in a discontinuous, episodic one. Periods of routine use are interrupted by episodes of intensive activity when new

uses, new contexts and new meanings are discovered. It is in this way that PowerPoint can be thought of not only as a learning technology, but as a technology that is itself learned by using, and whose learning reconstitutes the nature of learning.

5.7 Reinventing the lecture – from authoritative text to multimedia performance

Having offered a more equivocal assessment of some of the costs and benefits of PowerPoint technology, I would now like to examine how this technology is affecting the nature of a lecture and, more generally, classroom learning. In a much-quoted argument put forward at the time when computers were beginning to make a large impact in classrooms and offices, Zuboff (1985, 1988) contrasted two modes of implementing new technologies at the workplace. The first was termed ‘automation’ – a situation where the machine leaves the fundamental process unchanged but performs tasks previously carried out by humans or simpler machines.

This generally leads to marginal gains in productivity, staff redundancies and deskilling for the remaining workers. By contrast, Zuboff proposed a different mode of implementing new technology, for which she offered the not altogether helpful term ‘informate’, whereby fundamental tasks are rethought and reconfigured in the light of new technology. By ‘informating’ rather than automating tasks, some of the negative consequences of new technologies are avoided; instead of deskilling and alienating workers, new technologies can lead to a reskilling and, in some cases, enhanced autonomy and control in the workplace.

Like other types of technology, PowerPoint may be used to automate the lecturing process. Where an old-fashioned lecture may have employed a drawing on a blackboard to draw the relations between certain concepts, PowerPoint offers a colour diagram; where a traditional lecture may have used an anecdote or a joke to support an argument, a PowerPoint lecture may use a photograph or a cartoon to liven things up; where a traditional lecturer may have turned his or her back to the audience in order to produce a more or less successful circle on a blackboard, PowerPoint enables a lecturer to produce perfect circles, without sacrificing eye contact. Such uses of the technology essentially simplify old tasks. My argument, however, is that the influence of PowerPoint goes far beyond this, to reconfiguring the nature of lecturing into a multimedia, multi-skill performance, rather than the delivery of a more or less polished spoken text. The audience, for its part, may then approach the lecture as a multi-faceted experience, lived in several dimensions, visual and audio, cognitive and emotional. This is what Orlikowski and her co-authors (1995) refer to as metastructuring, a dual process whereby users adapt the meaning and scope of technology to particular practices, and the parallel process of altering contexts to fit the technology.

As a piece of technology-in-use, PowerPoint has very rapidly become an organising template that shapes beliefs and actions in lecture theatres, boardrooms, conference halls and elsewhere. At the same time, it has become a means through which knowledge is constructed as an organisational resource, codified, negotiated, contested and embodied (Tsoukas 1996). It seems to me that two factors conspire to encourage the metastructuring effected by PowerPoint: first, our society’s increasing emphasis on image and spectacle, and, relatedly, second, the new range of skills which emphasise multi-tasking, discontinuity, visual alertness and semiotic sensitivity as against patient and deep thinking, long periods of concentration and deference to the authority of a ‘text’. In emphasising the visual image, PowerPoint plays into our culture’s obsession with image, picture and spectacle. Writing at a time when most homes did not have a colour television and when computer screens and electronic games had not been invented, Guy Debord opened his situationist manifesto thus:

“In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation.” (Debord 1977, paragraph 1)

Allowing for the obvious hyperbole and the parody of Marx, Debord's premise seems to be even more apposite today than in the 60s when it became the basis of his then fashionable critique (see also Boorstin 1962; Brown 1998; Edelman 1988; Elkins 1998, 1999). Numerous theorists, including Bauman, Ritzer and Baudrillard, have since argued that spectacle has become the primary type of experience in late modernity, dominating almost every aspect of our public and private lives. Inspired by Bauman, Ritzer (1999), for instance, has argued that spectacle has led to a re-enchantment of the world in late modernity's cathedrals of consumption, such as shopping malls, glass buildings, tourist resorts, sports venues and theme parks, which are all minutely planned and orchestrated shows, with spectators themselves becoming part of the display.

Many, if not most, of our experiences are visual experiences, on our television screens and computer monitors, on posters, in newspapers and magazines, in our city streets and in our homes. Spectacle saturates public and private spaces, offering 'the promise of new, overwhelming, mind-boggling or spine-chilling, but always exhilarating experience' (Bauman 1997: 181). If, as McLuhan noted, the printing press brought about the first victory of the visual over the aural/oral (McLuhan 1962), the rise of television, spectacle and image accelerate the process. A few theorists have noted that, as our culture becomes more ocular-centric, i.e. dominated by spectacles and images appropriated and experienced through the eye, many of our theories have become ocular-phobic (Jay 1993; Kavanagh 2004).

As academics, we mistrust the image, fearing that it seduces, it misleads and it induces passivity. Undoubtedly, images can create their own regimes of truth, the hyper-real, that at times becomes more 'real' than reality (Baudrillard 1988; Boorstin 1962; Eco 1986; Gabriel 2005a; Sontag 1977). Yet, what has changed since the situationist critique is that some theorists of spectacle have offered a more nuanced evaluation. Image and spectacle do not invariably induce passivity and stupefaction. Appropriating images is far from a passive experience. As consumers in a society of spectacle, we are frequently seduced by image. But we also learn to mistrust image, to question and probe it. We develop skills to read and decode, question and ignore, frame and unframe, combine, dismiss and ignore images (Gabriel and Lang 2006). Visiting museums and art galleries, we learn to compare, contrast, filter out, frame and focus on particular exhibits. Similar skills are used in engaging with the diverse spectacles we observe in our streets, our shopping malls, our theatres and our theme parks. Even watching television can become an active experience, especially for young viewers, who constantly interpret images, characters and plots intertextually with reference to other images, characters and plots. Thompson, for example, notes that:

"Media messages are commonly discussed by individuals in the course of reception and subsequent to it ... [They] are transformed through an ongoing process of telling and retelling, interpretation and reinterpretation, commentary, laughter and criticism ... By taking hold of messages and routinely incorporating them into our lives ... we are constantly shaping and reshaping our skills and stocks of knowledge, testing our feelings and tastes, and expanding the horizons of our experience." (Thompson 1995: 42)

Not only have we become experts at appropriating images in different ways, but many of our memories assume visual forms. Retention becomes linked to image. As Susan Sontag put it, 'the memory museum is now mostly a visual one' (2004) – remembering has come to signify having a mental image of an event or of a phenomenon. An event captured on camera becomes instantly more memorable than one of which no visual record is left. If learning requires memory, most people today would more readily remember a well-chosen image than a well-argued case. By reconfiguring the lecture as a multimedia performance enabled by PowerPoint, rather than seeking to use PowerPoint to automate tasks previously performed by slides, chalk and board and so forth, the visual sensitivities and skills of our age can be put to the service of learning and education.

PowerPoint then becomes the latest prop to assume the 'part of the individual's performance which ... functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for

those who observe the performance' (Goffman 1959: 32), while the ability to project images and pictures (including photographs, cartoons, paintings and drawings), along with graphs, diagrams and even lists, allows lecturers to take advantage of their audiences' visual sensitivities and visual skills. PowerPoint could then be said to embed itself in organisational performances at two levels — a theatrical one, in which it functions as a symbolic prop, and a more technical one, in which it helps the construction and dissemination of knowledge in particular ways. Of course, Goffman and exponents of the dramaturgical approach of action would not accept this distinction. The risk of epistemic closure that PowerPoint carries (Karreman and Strannegard 2004) can then be overcome as creative users of PowerPoint discover that they can use it to generate and sustain discontinuity.

Discontinuity is a crucial element in many types of learning. Its importance for stimulating curiosity cannot be overestimated. Discontinuity between knowledge and experience, between different types of sensory stimuli, between emotion and cognition, between what is known and what is desired — all of these fuel a desire to learn and to explore. Discontinuity represents a boundary that invites transgression, a journey to be made, an unknown to be experienced. It also implies an anxiety to be conquered. In some ways, the very predictability and linearity of PowerPoint makes it a fascinating instrument to subvert, by taking a variety of risks. There are different performance risks that can be taken (e.g. risqué slides, collages, discontinuities, omissions and disruptions); there are fascinating and troubling juxtapositions of narrative and imagery; there are startling possibilities of irony and self-parody, where the spoken text points in one direction and the projected picture in a different one. In such ways, the lecture can be reconfigured from listening carefully to a single voice of authority to an experience of seeking to decode a multiplicity of signals, some audio, some visual, which sometimes reinforce each other, sometimes are out of step with each other and sometimes interact with each other to produce novel effects.

This proposed reconfiguration of the lecture as a multimedia performance builds not only on our culture's obsession with spectacle but also on a wide range of skills that are emerging in a new generation of pupils groomed on watching television, playing computer games and decoding advertisements while at the same time talking on their mobile phones and preparing their homework. These skills have replaced the older skills of learning that involved patience, concentration and application. By contrast, the skills of today involve speed, multi-tasking, short bursts of concentration and the ability to deal with constant interruptions. The skills include (if I may be permitted proposing a list):

- filtering out much that is irrelevant noise and focusing on what creates a memorable emotional experience;
- tolerating uncertainty, lack of plot and absence of closure;
- coping with plurivocality, with ill-defined characters and ambiguous moral messages;
- accepting experiences with ambiguous or opaque meanings, without closure;
- enjoying puzzles without permanent solutions;
- juxtaposing, comparing and criticising.

For all our concerns regarding the suppression of critical spirit in learning, our culture is far from uncritical. On the contrary, as consumers we are accustomed to criticising constantly the products, services and experiences that we have and those we observe in others. Under an increasingly consumerist ethos in education, lecturers themselves become frequent objects of comparison and criticism by their students. In its early days, using PowerPoint at all may have been enough to impress students. As, however, they become exposed to different performances and different uses, they learn to discriminate, to compare and to creatively appropriate.

5.8 Conclusion

What I am proposing is that PowerPoint does not have to be viewed as a machine in the service of a strict regime of knowledge management, as some of its critics have claimed (Alvesson and Karreman 2001). Nor, in line with a naive interpretation of McLuhan's well-known aphorism, does PowerPoint always operate as a medium that tyrannically conveys a fixed set of messages (McLuhan 1964). Instead, it can convey a multiplicity of messages, in a multiplicity of ways. In particular, it can be viewed as a resource that builds on our culture's emphasis on image and related skills of decoding, multi-tasking, filtering and criticising. Instead of automating existing features of the lecture, it can redefine the lecture as a multimedia experience, problematising knowledge, posing questions, framing puzzles, creating discontinuities and stimulating a desire to learn. It can then make use of our culture's predilection for multidimensional experiences, for texts with diverse and obscure meanings, for images that can be decoded in a variety of ways. In such circumstances, lecturers themselves, instead of being deskilled, rely on a new range of skills to make the best of the resource available to them. Instead of using PowerPoint in a routine, mechanical manner, they experiment with different possibilities and discover new potentials.

In so doing, they can use PowerPoint just as sophisticated consumers use the things they buy, in ways that go beyond the designs of the designers, manufacturers or advertisers (De Certeau 1984). They combine different components, they make unorthodox uses of specific items, and they reframe and modify the things they use, to meet their desires and express their individuality. The term 'paragramme' has been proposed for flexible routines, around which users improvise, innovate and reconfigure (Gabriel 2002) to create new and unique solutions, new and unique performances. In contrast to 'programmatic' users, who rely on closely following instructions and recipes, paragrammatic users are flexible, idiosyncratic, opportunistic and ad hoc. They enjoy 'bricolage' and tinkering (Fiske 1989; Lévi-Strauss 1966; Linstead and Grafton-Small 1990; Weick 1993) with the resources available to them, eschewing what is predictable and 'programmed'. Paragrammatic users of PowerPoint may resort to lists and bullet points when the situation demands, they may show pictures when they present an interesting complement or counterpoint to the argument being made, and they may discard the technology altogether when they risk lapsing into predictable and mind-numbing routine. Instead of bemoaning the rigidity of the resource, they look for ways to make it pliable and surprising. In this way, they avoid falling into the tyranny of PowerPoint, as well as blaming PowerPoint for other more subtle forms of tyranny.

PowerPoint becomes a creative resource, mastery and even virtuosity over which can be a feature of the user's professional identity, rather than a threat to it (Lamb and Davidson 2005; McLaughlin and Webster 1998; Walsham 1998; Wenger 1998). When used in a paragrammatic way, PowerPoint becomes part of an 'epistemology of practice' (Cook and Brown 1999), involving a wide range of skills in its use, and delivering a diversity of learnings as its outputs, instantiating what Cook and Brown refer to as the 'generative dance between knowledge and knowing [that] is a powerful source of organisational innovation' (Cook and Brown 1999: 381). Instead of replacing arguments, theories, narratives and stories with images, lists and trite graphs, PowerPoint can open up the possibility of juxtaposing and comparing arguments with lists, enriching narratives with images and adding to the clarity of theories with graphs. Different contexts invite different uses, different users employ it differently, and different members of audiences make sense of it in different ways. Paragrammatic users allow PowerPoint to function side by side with other genres (e.g. the vignette, the story, the syllogism, the typology and so forth) that enable its users to make sense of complex organisational realities without misleading and premature codifications.

In conclusion, I would argue that, like many forms of information technology (such as computers, email, and even the internet), PowerPoint in its early stages seemed to offer the convenience of doing old tasks in more efficient and more polished ways. It created exaggerated hopes (for some parties) and concerns (for others) that it would lead to tighter knowledge management, through codification, standardisation and closure. Overall, the conveniences afforded by PowerPoint were viewed as having a downside, which

included deskilling, routinising and standardising. In line with a widely held western anxiety, technology becomes the slave-turned-master, imposing its tyranny on everything it touches. My contention is that many users of this technology have realised that this tyranny is not unavoidable and that, like other types of educational technology, when used in a creative and non-routine way, it can provide a learning and a teaching experience in line with the visual sensitivities and skills of our times.

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