INTERDISCIPLINARY WORKSHOP:
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON NEUROSCIENCE IN ORGANIZATION STUDIES

17th April 2013
09:00 – 16:30

VENUE
The Foresight Centre, University of Liverpool Management School

ORGANISERS
Dr Mike Zundel and Dr Dirk Lindebaum, University of Liverpool Management School

FUNDING
This workshop is co-funded by the Northern Advanced Research Training Initiative (NARTI), the North West Doctoral Training Centre, and the British Academy of Management.

GUEST SPEAKERS
Prof David Wastell, Nottingham Business School
Prof Paul Edwards, Birmingham Business School

SOME KEY QUESTIONS:

- Are we at the brink of a neuroscientific revolution business research?
- Will traditional social science approaches soon become obsolete?
- Profit, knowledge, wellbeing – what are the aims of organization and management studies?
- What are the social and ethical implications of neuroscientific theories and methods?

REGISTRATION
To register for this event, please click on this link and follow the instructions provided.
ABOUT THE TOPIC

Over recent years, organisational researchers have keenly embraced neuroscientific theories and methods, promising radical transformations in analysis of organizational phenomena. For instance, Becker et al., (2011, pp. 934, italics added) propose that the study of neuroscience can “elucidate particular networks of brain systems and processes responsible for the workplace attitudes and behaviors that organizational scholars have observed”. This paves the way for interventions directly on the brain level to select or modify the behaviour of employees, or to improve managerial decision-making and, thus, organizational performance. In the area of leadership, for example, Waldman et al., (2011, p. 60) suggest that neuroscience can revolutionise the identification of inspirational leaders and their subsequent development. While indicating a few remaining challenges, the authors argue that we “may now have the potential to advance our understanding of the brain’s role in producing effective leadership behavior and to explore how the brain itself might be used to better develop exemplary leadership potential” (ibid: 72).

The progressive optimism of neuroscience advocates is readily embraced by many scholars who, finally, glimpse the possibility of establishing a scientifically valid, measurable, and definitive base for the study of organisational behaviour. Neuroscience may thus come to replace causally ambiguous, complex and often messy approaches that emanate from less ‘exact’ traditions such as psychology or sociology, which have been frequently employed in organizational research. Neuroscience, it seems, heralds a paradigmatic revolutions in the ways in which we come to understand, research and influence organizational life (Cropanzano & Becker, in press; Lindebaum, in press-a, in press-b). The implications of this change are already visible. For example, several top-tier organisation and management journals have recently devoted special editions and fast-tracked commentaries to the possibilities of neuroscience. We also witness a trend towards funding for research that is based on inner-body explanations, for instance in sociology (Duster, 2006), but also in the development and justification of social policy (Wastell & White 2012). We can, therefore, expect large-scale changes not only in the ways in which research is commissioned and published, but also in terms of research training and development towards scientific-medical approaches and methodologies.

There are, however, serious concerns about the viability of the organizational neuroscientific programme. For instance, there has been a long-standing debate about the problems of reductionism in social science (e.g., Edwards, 2012; Oppenheim & Putnam, 1958), and thus the possibility of dealing with higher order social phenomena (organisations or individuals) on a lower analytical level (brain or neurons). Similarly, serious ethical concerns have been levelled against the prospect of neuroscientific improvement or selection programmes for human beings (Lindebaum, in press-b; Tallis, 2011). Finally, and partly acknowledged in organisational neuroscience debates, there are a range of problems associated with measurement and methodology, including problems in establishing exact one-to-one connections between brain processes and social phenomena (Lee, Senior, & Butler, 2012), possible distortions that accrue when findings are correlated across hierarchical levels (cf. Fisher & To, 2012), and the difficulty of accounting for the creative and interpretive influence of consciousness in form of the neuroscientific researcher in the production of categories and findings (Lindebaum and Zundel, forthcoming).
AIM OF WORKSHOP

This workshop provides an interdisciplinary forum to critically discuss the possibilities and limitations of organisational neuroscience. Our aim is to bring together researchers from business and management studies with academics from other social sciences, as well as neuroscience, to collaboratively discuss possibilities and limitations of this emerging field.

The workshop will consist of plenary panel discussions as well as group work and we are delighted to welcome two external expert panellists, Prof Wastell and Prof Edwards, who have researched and published widely in the areas of neuroscience and work processes.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

This workshop is primarily targeted at doctoral students across the North West (NWDTC), as well as early career researchers, spanning the domains of psychology, sociologic, and business and management, but also from other areas of social science in which neuroscientific ideas are currently debated. We also particularly invite scholars more directly involved in neuroscientific research.

WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<td>09:00 – 09:30</td>
<td>Registration and Coffee</td>
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| 09:30 – 09:45 | Welcome and Introduction  
Dr M. Zundel and Dr D. Lindebaum                                  |
| 09:45 – 10:15 | Prof David Wastell - The role of neuroscience in informing policy      |
| 10:15 – 10:45 | Prof Paul Edwards - Causal Inferences in socially complex settings      |
| 10:45 – 11:45 | Coffee Break                                                            |
| 11:45 – 12:15 | Dr Mike Zundel - The role of neuroscience in influencing research agendas|
| 12:15 – 12:45 | Dr Dirk Lindebaum - Ethical and social implications of neuroscience     |
| 12:45 – 14:00 | Lunch break                                                             |
| 14:00 – 15:30 | Group discussions (Group I to IV)                                       |
| 15:30 – 15:45 | Coffee Break                                                            |
| 15:45 – 16:30 | Panel discussion and Summary                                             |
TOPICS FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS

In the afternoon, participants can join one of the following different working groups:

Group I: The role of neuroscience in informing policy (chair: D. Wastell),
Group II: Causal Inferences in socially complex settings (chair: Paul Edwards)
Group III: The role of neuroscience in influencing research agendas (chair: M. Zundel).
Group IV: Ethical and social implications of neuroscience (chair: D. Lindebaum),

There is no attendance fee for the event, but availability for this event is limited to 40 participants and places will be allocated on a first come first served basis.

For catering purposes, please indicate your attendance by 10th of April 2012 to Nicole Watts. Any other inquiries concerning the event should be directed to Dr Mike Zundel or Dr Dirk Lindebaum.

For directions see the map

➢ Travel expenses (doctoral students only) will be refunded up to £20.

BIOGRAPHIES

Prof David Wastell began his academic career as a cognitive neuroscientist at Durham University, studying the relationships between brain activity and psychological processes. His interests in technology and work developed over an extended period of time at several institutions. His current interests include neuroscience and social policy, psycho-physiological design of complex human-machine systems, design and innovation in the public services.

Prof Paul Edwards’s research career began with the study of workplace industrial relations and industrial conflict. He has subsequently studied new management practices in the workplace and managerial careers, both in the UK and in international comparison. His research interests revolve around human resource management policies in multinational companies, employment relations in small firms, workplace employment relations and industrial conflict, as well as the sociology of work and employment. He is also the Editor-in-Chief of Human Relations.

Dr Mike Zundel is a Senior Lecturer in management at the University of Liverpool Management School. His work focuses on organizational practice theory, institutional theory, as well as the sociology of science and the academic knowledge production process. Connecting these strands is his interest in the complex relational patterns that connect individuals and wider organizational contexts, and how these relations can be understood in terms of processes.

Dr Dirk Lindebaum is a Reader in management at University of Liverpool Management School. One stream of his research activities pertains to organizational phenomena that involve emotional processes, such as emotional intelligence and leadership, as well as issues of conformity, power, and deviance. Another stream that he has pursued of late concerns the increasing visibility of neuroscientific theories and methods in the study of organizational behavior.
KEY ARTICLES


