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# The End of Managerial Control?

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# The End of Managerial Control?\*

## Abstract

This paper has the aim of considering whether managerial control, no matter its form, has outlived its usefulness in post-bureaucratic society, and if so, whether it can be replaced by a more emancipatory discourse among local practitioners as they confront the immanent requirements of social interaction within their own practices. The paper initially reviews the limitations of bureaucratic control and considers post-bureaucratic or “soft” alternatives as sources of empowerment. Seen as ideals, post-bureaucratic options are not thought to overturn the imposition of control in organizing, but the relocation of the positioning of work to the practice setting offers management a new role as the facilitator of the critical discourse required to sustain and enhance local activity.

**Keywords:** managerial control, post-bureaucracy, practice, labor process, corporate culture, participative values, social networks, facilitation, Foucault, subjectification, identity, empowerment

## Background

If management textbooks are any sign of how to run a contemporary organization (see, e.g., Griffin, 2008), the classic function of control, originally specified by Henri Fayol (1949), appears to be alive and well. Control is the one way managers can align employees’ capabilities with the organization’s goals (Cyert and March, 1963; Perrow, 1970; Thompson, 1967). Using

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bureaucratic authority, those higher up in the hierarchy – the managers - determine the effectiveness of those lower down – the workers. By establishing performance standards, managers, furthermore, can hold workers accountable while minimizing costs, controlling errors, and otherwise regulating an increasingly complex environment.

Nevertheless, within bureaucracy let alone in the post-bureaucratic era, the effectiveness of managerial control has been called into question (Crozier, 1964; Merton, 1940; Scott, 1992). It has been argued, for example, that costs expended by organizations to operate the administrative mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and sanction member behavior consume scarce resources without adding value (Seabright and Delacroix, 1996; Williamson, 1975). Indeed, the effect of external controls on employee behavior can be negative if they result in loss of commitment and shirking (Hennart, 1989; Jones, 1995). Further, as our work flows are regulated more by technology itself, the activities in which operating employees engage are becoming increasingly less routinized (Zuboff, 1988). What remains is work increasingly tied to discretion. Control needs to be taken over by those closest to the problem. In fact, instead of referring to control, we might refer to the process of linking processes and activities as that of “coordination.” In cases when the units and their workers have become self-organizing in which they themselves determine the course of work on the basis of their practice as part of the natural flow of working together, we may even begin to question whether control, as an organizing concept, even applies. Have we reached the point in a projected post-bureaucratic order to have encountered the “end of managerial control?”

This paper considers whether control, be it as a formal bureaucratic mechanism or as an informal post-bureaucratic process, has outlived its usefulness. Initially, I review the classic approach to control based on rational economic assumptions and also consider its dampening effect on both organization and worker welfare. The alternative to formal control, namely

informal or soft control through norms and trust, is next described as a post-bureaucratic option that can both empower and disempower workers, especially since it can conjoin workers' identities with that of the organization. Rather than emancipate workers, post-bureaucracy can lead to an even unwitting restriction of voice through self- and team-surveillance, censorship, and discipline. At this point, the essay will consider the question whether control should be consigned as an inevitability of organizational life or whether it can be transformed into alternative discourses conducive to emancipation. This will make way for a full discussion of the paramount issue of whether or not we can entertain the end of managerial control in our post-bureaucratic age, which in some quarters has also been associated with a post-heroic leaderful form of leadership. Indeed, our current era is making way for a shift in the locus of work from the corporate board to the local practice in which practitioners on the ground create their everyday immanent operating strategies in which self-determined social interactions replace asymmetrical influence. I conclude by asserting that the managerial role under these new circumstances is not to *control* the process but to serve as a facilitator of the necessary critical discourse among the members of the practice, including its surrounding social network, to build a culture of learning within the organization.

Throughout the account, I will for the most part refer to management at upper levels, rather than to those who occupy middle and front-line positions. A controversial matter in its own right, there is ambivalence even among neo-Marxists whether middle managers should be considered a target or an agent of control since they occupy an ambiguous position within capitalist relations of production (Willmott, 1997). In many instances, just like any employee, they are concerned about their identity expressed through a range of conditions, such as their job performance, career advancement, and supervisory effectiveness, which, in turn, can produce contradictory consequences for the fulfillment of capital.

Finally, although labor process theorists have established the irreducible interrelationship between employee resistance and managerial control (see, e.g., Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Jermier, Knights, and Nord, 1994; Knights, Willmott, and Collinson, 1985; Storey, 1985), I won't take up the rich issue of resistance here other than to acknowledge it as a natural outcome of the unwarranted imposition of control. The more modest aim of the paper, then, is to consider the inevitability of the imposition of managerial control, however enacted, and if its replacement might minimally make way for more humane and effective forms.

### **The Classic Approach to Control**

Before considering alternatives to managerial control, let's review the classic approach very much embedded in conventional views of bureaucratic organization based on a rational model of discourse. Most empirical work on this subject subscribes to this rational approach, in which it is not whether but how control can be best orchestrated under given conditions. In particular, if the "controller" is knowledgeable about and can observe (either directly or through information systems) the behaviors that "controllees" use in their work, then behavioral control can be used to monitor, evaluate, and reward them. Feedback is also used as a remedial tool to correct deviations (Turcotte, 1974). If, on the other hand, the behaviors cannot be observed but the outcomes can be measured, then outcome control can be used to evaluate and reward controllees (Eisenhardt, 1985; Ouchi, 1979). Finally, when information about a job's performance requirements is incomplete and the standards of desirable performance are ambiguous, input control becomes the most appropriate strategy. Primarily operating as a selection and training device, though it can also have a socializing function (Ouchi, 1979), it regulates the antecedent conditions of performance, such as the knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees (Snell, 1992). Some systems attempt to use combinations of behaviors, outcomes,

and inputs. Take for example the case of retail sales. Since some behaviors are observable (i.e., how quickly an order is taken or how the customer is addressed) and outcomes are measurable (i.e., sales volume), controllers might be encouraged to measure both.

This classic treatment of bureaucratic control, in its calculative formulation, relies upon an economic view of organizations that has been enhanced through agency theory (see, e.g., Fama and Jensen, 1983). Accordingly, employees enter into a contract with an employer to provide their labor in exchange for an inducement in the form of a wage or salary. They will tend to sustain the contract as long as the benefit they receive from their participation is worth the sacrifice they are making. The employer, meanwhile, attempts to sustain employee contracts by delivering sufficient resources to its employees to sustain their ongoing involvement (Sunder, 2002). However, as an agent of the organization, the manager must ensure that the investment made by the employer in its employees is netting a fair return. To ensure that this cost-benefit relationship remains favorable, it is natural for management to measure and control the ongoing performance of their employees.

Besides agency theory, transaction cost economics and contingency theory also produce rational prescriptions for controlling work processes based on a host of labor transaction attributes and environmental and structural contingencies (Chenhall, 2003; Vazquez, 2006; Williamson, 1985). For example, environmental dynamism, which we might define as the number of environmental contingencies, such as new technologies or increasing government regulation, would likely reduce the value of hierarchical control (Applegate, 1998; Ouchi, 1980). These rational theories call for supplementing the list of available control processes by incorporating control by peers (the ability of workers to control themselves and each other) and by standardization (the routinization of procedures) (Alchian and Demsetz, 1972; Mintzberg, 1979).

Although the rational approach described here makes sense using economic logic, it may not have purchase in organizations because they are inherently social. People simply don't always act according to a fixed view of rationality. Workers occasionally extend effort either greater or less than the expectations of behavior from the reward received. Furthermore, the neo-economic model relies on a degree of predictability especially about outcomes; yet, outcomes in many of our product markets and services are often impossible to predict. For example, do we know whether a law firm associate will win her case? Do we know that a software engineer will produce a superior code? Do we know whether a research initiative will become commercializable; and if so, will we know to whom to attribute the successful invention? These concerns do not appear to stop corporate management, according to post-structuralists and Foucauldians, from continuing their search for the "knowability" of the individual (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Foucault, 1980a; Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, and Walkerdine, 1984; Townley, 1993). Once an individual's subjectivity is known, it can be measured and classified, and ultimately, governed.

A further problem with the rational treatment of control is that our bureaucracies are breaking down in the current era. Under unrelenting pressures of globalization, mass customization, and hyper-competition, most large organizations have become flatter and increasingly virtual. As system boundaries have become more porous, many organizations participate in webs of partnerships in which control is as much a function of social capital as it is personal supervision. Responsibility devolves to whoever has the appropriate expertise and resides as often in cross-functional teams or in self-synchronizing units as in a single supervisor (Baird and Griffin, 2006; Raelin 2003).

Post-bureaucratic formats, upon which I will elaborate later, have been proposed to produce greater shared influence, consensus, and internal trust throughout the organization,

obviating the need for hierarchy and rule-governed behavior (Sewell, 1998). For example, project management has been proposed as a method to increase employees' empowerment, autonomy, and self-reliance. However, Hodgson (2004), among others has shown that these structures can result in re-bureaucratization because of their focus on visibility, predictability, and accountability as operationalized through adherence to formalized procedures and pervasive report writing.

### **Soft Control**

Given the constraints against formal control conditions under bureaucracy, there has been a call for “soft” or informal control, or control through culture, norms, and trust rather than through hard direction (Grey and Garsten, 2001). In particular, corporate culture has been proposed to be especially useful to management in producing a motivated workforce intent on achieving high levels of productivity because it links workers to a common set of core values, beliefs and assumptions (Denison, 1984; Lim, 1995; Ouchi, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982). Since control through market and rules has become increasingly less viable (Lebas and Weigenstein, 1986), culture can achieve both performance and equity goals (Alvesson and Lindkvist, 1993) by invoking a spirit of shared identity and organic solidarity (from Durkheim, 1933). What distinguishes it from formal controls is its conveyance through the expression of sentiments, beliefs, and attitudes. If done successfully – and its communication falls clearly into the hands of management – culture leads to an internalization of desired values and norms, which makes constant surveillance unnecessary (Pfeffer, 1981; Ray, 1986). It goes without saying that the potency of any of these soft control methodologies, such as culture, is conditional upon organizational members' receptiveness to them (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

Soft controls, by themselves or combined with formal control systems (Cardinal, Sitkin, and Long, 2005), are controls nevertheless, though perhaps in sheep's clothing. Corporate managers attempting to survive in their own competitive worlds may have little patience with workers' developing their own separate norms of conduct. Indeed, management may engage in what Ouchi (1979) referred to as "clan control," or a pursuit of ideological conformity. According to this strategy, they would ensure that the selection process would carefully choose individuals who would fit into the clan which, itself, would operate on the basis of common values and philosophy. Subsequently, management would systematically attempt to cultivate the common culture by using both formal and informal means to reinforce acceptable behaviors among members of the clan.

Accordingly, workers would be conscripted to *get on board* with the corporate program and support the culture already predetermined. This would include sustaining corporate norms of conduct, such as codifying team rules and intensifying monitoring and appraisal, the results of which might feel as coercive as the more explicit bureaucratic procedures (Donnellon and Scully, 1994; Sinclair, 1994). Charles O'Reilly (1989) in advancing the cause of soft control through culture even pointed out: "With social controls, we [employees] often feel as though we have great autonomy, even though paradoxically we are conforming much more" (p. 12).

Using the so-called "velvet glove of control" (Jermier, 1998), management may go no further than provide their workers with an illusion of empowerment as they seek to align the latter's personal goals and aspirations with the will of the organization (Mueller, 1994). This may include the ultimate nefarious act of attempting to control the employee's mind to only think that he or she is empowered. However, the employee is subtly rewarded only for behavior that subscribes to the goals of the managerial elite. Critical theorists (see, e.g., Knights and Willmott, 1987) point out that a corporate power structure can promote this illusion of

empowerment by using the internal public media of the organization, including the manipulation of language. For example, the word “control” can be replaced by “commitment,” as evidence that management, using decentralized methods such as teamwork, is promoting a culture of voice and involvement (Walton, 1985; Reed, 1992). The expression, “team-player,” is often a euphemism for someone who plays his part without dissent or complaint (Jackall, 1988). Even the salutary words, “self-development” or “self-expression,” may merely represent refined forms of self-control and self-discipline (Costea, Crump, and Amiridis, 2008).

The corporate culture movement can thus be co-opted to openly or subtly promote performative behavior that can at best engage workers in a *false consciousness* about their presumed participation in the managerial culture (Raelin, 2001; 2008). Their insecurity can be exploited by the marketing of a corporate image that ameliorates their fears by having them conjoin their personal goals with the company’s superordinate goals. Although they are presumed to be working to expand their creativity and exercise their discretion, the ultimate goal is to train them to work productively on the job (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Soeters, 1986).

It is quite possible, then, that so-called “cultural” practices can end up disempowering workers by fortifying control or intensifying work activity in the name of progress (Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998; Parker and Slaughter, 1988). In fact, labor process theory suggests that, owing to new information technologies that can increase the scope and reach of workplace surveillance while relying on subtle forms of horizontal control within teams, real discretion and autonomy among workers may be more curtailed now than even under pure Weberian bureaucracy (Burawoy, 1979; Poster, 1990; Rosen and Baroudi, 1992; Sewell, 1998). Weber’s conception (1947) at least provided workers with the protection of rules and procedures against the pure whim of management. Under what is referred to as post-bureaucracy, organizational structure transitions from objective rules, hierarchical authority, and influence based on formal position to

broad public standards of performance, flexible peer decision-making processes, and influence based on personal qualities (Heckscher, 1994). However, control remains intact except rather than use authority structure, it relies on sophisticated methods of unobtrusive ideational appraisal that, according to some critical observers, not only reduces discretion but centralizes decision making into the hands of an information-rich elite (Heydebrand, 1989). Aided by electronic surveillance and monitoring, team members can presumably control themselves collectively by identifying those among the group who are shirking or failing to achieve production targets. As an elegant form of snooping, it turns the value of teamwork upside down. While promoted as a basis for humanizing the workforce (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993; Manz and Sims, 1990; Zuboff, 1988), it can be used as a control vehicle usurped by managers who by recruiting allies within the group can destroy the democratic process through sheer intimidation.

### **Is Control an Inevitability of Organizational Behavior?**

We would conclude at this point that post-bureaucracy, though bringing with it organizational forms that are flatter, rounder, and more loosely coupled than the traditional hierarchy, can nevertheless substitute technology and subtle team coercion for formal bureaucratic control (Child and McGrath, 2001; Raelin, 2005). Both also feature a relatively low level of democratic participation. Yet, democratic values are often espoused by our corporate organizations – though unfortunately rarely practiced. Why is this so?

For readers familiar with the field of action science (Argyris and Schön, 1974; Argyris and Schön, 1978), this inconsistency is the base of action science's "theory of action" approach in which our very human nature prevents us from confronting the gap. Instead, most individuals become defensive and consequently distance themselves from responsibility for acknowledging any inconsistency.

Some workers may acknowledge the value of participatory engagement but even when invited to participate may refrain because of personal and situational conditions. They may, for example, wait out management because of a high self-monitoring acuity that requires evidence before a new regime is trusted (Caliguiri and Day, 2000; Sosik, Jung, and Dinger, 2009). From a theory of action perspective (Argyris and Schön, 1978), changes entailing wider engagement may run up against organizational defensive routines, which are difficult to overcome without free and informed choice and inquiry based on “actionable knowledge.”

Another critical tradition in employee relations, workplace democracy, would ask, as Robert Dahl (1984) did, why if democracy is justified in governing the state, it is “not justified in governing economic enterprises” (p. 54)? The reason seems to be that workers, especially in the United States, view work and political situations differently. Americans generally also have faith in the market and see the benefit of accepting its risks (Lane, 1985; McClosky and Zaller, 1985).

Further, workplace democracy and its concomitant of empowerment (Greenberg, 1975; Kirkman and Rosen, 1999; Spreitzer, 1996) are dependent on the nature and depth of workers’ influence over workplace decisions. It is one thing to be consulted on decisions of import to the organization; it is another to have *control* over workplace decisions. It is also not unusual for employees, having succumbed to a top-down culture for much of their career, not to trust a proclamation granting them sudden autonomy and control (Judge, 1999).

Since individuals hold many different values and also waver in the values that are important to them over their lifetime, the professed value of participation or democracy may also constitute merely a weak or transient value (Cropanzano, James, and Citera, 1992). So, when some employees confront a surrounding culture that practices soft control, not real

participation, they may be willing to submit since it may be easier than fighting for free expression (Ogbor, 2001).

If formal control is widely endorsed within the organization, those espousing democratic practices, especially those in management, may be correspondingly viewed as indecisive and weak. They may instead choose to avoid displaying these practices for fear of not seeming "in control." Further, the demise in recent years of such behemoth companies as Worldcom and Enron, due to ethical lapses in conjunction with rather gross accounting irregularities, may have given top managers the impression that they would operate at their own risk (e.g., *out-of-control*) if they were not to completely control their company.

We need to recall that control remains a popular prescription for managerial behavior since it fits with the view that we require an "orderly universe," one that eschews uncertainty and paradox. Indeed, institutional theory proposes that selective use of both formal and soft control mechanisms can not only sustain but can also build trust in organizations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Sitkin and George, 2005). Invoking formal and informal codes can convey appropriateness, objectivity, and impartiality that can ward off threats to trust, legitimacy, and clarity (Morand, 1995; Styhre, 2008; Zucker, 1988). Discourses that seek to reveal the dark side of control can also produce fragmentation of the self and may only produce autonomy for those willing to explore what has previously been suppressed or contained (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Deetz, 1992; Weedon, 1987).

So, as some poststructuralists such as Foucault (1995) remind us, objectification can give way to subjectification that, in turn, can both constrain and enable agency (Lacombe, 1996). Late modernity has seen a proliferation in the practice of control through the use of such devices as observation, classification, examination, and surveillance (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992), but these devices do not automatically lead to domination; as an expression

of power and knowledge, they can also lead to self-determination (Foucault, 1980b, 1988). In the labor process, for example, workers can use any number of codes, such as ridicule, to sustain their identity at management's expense (Collinson, 1992; Knights, 2002). Since control derives from power and power is a concomitant to reality, Foucauldian thought would have us conclude that control is an inevitability of organizational behavior. In a capitalist economy based on disciplinarity, workers are likely to be inescapably embedded within power relations – both as subjects and objects (O'Doherty and Willmott, 2001). So the effect of control need not be sheer injection of values into the subject (Lianos, 2003).

However, self-determined identity may issue from a host of diverse influences other than from control. There are alternative discourses that can be more efficient to identity formation and less initially disintegrative than control. For example, consensual decision making, if authentic, may substitute for resistance to control, and although resistance can contribute to one's identity as a resistor, it may not be entirely emancipatory. At W. L. Gore and Associates, a world-renowned manufacturer that operates without a hierarchy and that features a voluntary turnover (quit) rate of a mere 5 percent, control has been replaced by social relationships, shared responsibility, and, in Bill Gore's words, "fun" (Manz, Shipper, and Stewart, 2009). Have we reached a point in which external managerial control has not only outlived its usefulness but has become obsolete as an organizing vehicle of management?

### **The End of Control?**

Both pundit and practitioner may concur in the belief that hierarchical control in some form is a natural institutional mechanism of organizational life because of the need to divide work up by levels of complexity and variation in time horizon (Adler, 1999; Jaques, 1990; Malnight, 2001). Its attenuation may occur only in cases of contingency, such as the

nature of the task environment or the nature of workers' capacity. As long as there is variance in these contingent variables, however, there is likely to be a need for control. But what if we began to view 21st Century work as a local practice as much as an industrial product?

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, organizational analysts were presaging a redesign of the corporate order in the form of post-industrialism (see, e.g., Bell, 1976), in which structure would need to accommodate an explosion in knowledge capability and exchange through a new class of "knowledge workers," and of post-hierarchy (Zuboff, 1988), in which power and responsibility in organizations would flow to the task and actors at hand. In 1980, Henry Mintzberg (1980) referred to the adhocracy as the "structure of our age," and, as a post-bureaucratic form, it has only grown in popularity since that time. For example, the percentage of use of autonomous work groups among large U.S. firms and multinationals has been pegged as high as 47 percent (Guzzo and Dickson, 1996; Kirkman and Rosen, 1999), and even higher (58%) among British firms (McGovern, Hill, Mills, and White, 2007). Rather than rely on classic managerial control, Mintzberg asserted that adhocracy *coordinates* by mutual adjustment primarily among well-trained professional specialists who are often found working in multidisciplinary teams. Mutual adjustment, in the form of shared sense-making or collective learning, substitutes for asymmetrical influence processes associated with bureaucratic organization. The dominant organizing vehicle in the adhocracy is the project, which as a self-governing entity obviates the need for strategy-making from the top. Team- and project-based structures tend to organize laterally often across a wide value chain of stakeholders. Social capital is viewed in these structures as critical to knowledge creation, so practitioners, including managers, are as likely to be as involved in interorganizational as intraorganizational social networks (Brass, 2000; Schneider, 2002; Vlaar, van den Bosch, and Volberda, 2007). In these settings, management is unlikely to possess conventional

managerial authority that relies upon hierarchical control (Borgatti and Foster, 2003). Indeed, the exercise of unified control may be no more than an illusion in which control may only apply to superficial but measurable indicators of performance that belie the conditions on the ground.

The survival of control in such post-bureaucratic settings may rest on whether managers choose to endorse the formation of spontaneous and enduring project groups and communities of practice that can establish their own identity and self-control while entertaining a unitary framing from the strategic level of the organization (Clark and Butcher, 2006). In this framework, work would not be orchestrated from the top of an organizational pyramid to be passed down a chain of command as much as it would be created as a practice among local practitioners who establish their own norms through interactions within a dedicated community. Knowledge itself would not be traced back to the individual mind as it would be to the individual's involvement in ongoing local cultural-historical processes (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

The practitioners would be in the local setting co-creating their everyday immanent operating strategies and likewise developing shared conceptions of activity and new modes of action (Chia and Holt, 2006; Engeström, Engeström, and Vahaaho, 1999). They would not be controlled through force, reward, nor any other instrumental means including detached external rules or codes because they would already be engaged and, in many instances, self-managed (Kirkman and Shapiro, 1997). They would maintain meaning through social interactions involving such unfoldings as skilled improvisations, practical coping, and negotiation of shared understanding (Chia and Holt, 2006; Gergen and Gergen, 1988; Goffman, 1967; Mead, 1934; Raelin, 2008). In instances when interdependence among the parties might be asymmetric, management could decide, rather than attempt to control the

parties through formal mechanisms, that its principal option is to foster coordination and strong ties (Gargiulo, Ertug, and Galunic, 2009; Lazega, 2001; Uzzi, 1997).

Accompanying the post-bureaucratic age as the new century's structure is the need to consider leadership as "post-heroic," in which control – if it exists at all in its original sense – is no longer linear as much as it is widely distributed throughout the organization (Balogun, 2003; Raelin, 2003; Rouleau, 2005). Call it "mutual control," it devolves to those actors or sectional units which have a direct vested interest in the decision at hand. The conduct of leadership in this setting is one of concertive and collective action rather than a compilation of individuals acts (Gronn, 2002).

Elsewhere, I have characterized the concurrent and collective sharing of decision making processes and actions through mutual dialogue as "leaderful" practices (Raelin, 2003). In leaderful organizations, everyone's talent is mobilized to contribute to the goals of the entity. People bring their whole selves to work and feel "at home" contributing to the greater good. Given an increasingly networked economy sustained by webs of partnerships, as described earlier, it makes less and less sense to traverse the hierarchy to check with "headquarters" to clear decisions. In most cases, people within the practice are the ones who have the necessary information at their disposal to make the most efficacious decisions (Spreitzer and Mishra, 1999).

Managerial control in a "leaderful" world can be depicted as increasingly outdated, though in the following quotes by two successful executives, its utility was questioned in earlier times. First, we turn to William McKnight, chairman of the board of 3M Corporation from 1949 to 1966. Known for his management theories that served as guiding principles at 3M (1948), he once said:

Mistakes will be made. But if a person is essentially right, the mistakes he or she makes are not as serious in the long run as the mistakes management will make if it undertakes to tell those *in authority* [italics added] exactly how they must do their jobs.

Some fifty years later, another board chairperson and former chief executive, Herb Kelleher (1997) of Southwest Airlines, in answer to a question from a financial analyst about whether his bottom-up participative methods would result in his losing control of the organization, responded:

I've never had control and I never wanted it. We're not looking for blind obedience. We're looking for people who on their own initiative want to be doing what they're doing because they consider it to be a worthy objective. That I cannot possibly know everything that goes on in our operation - and don't pretend to - is a source of competitive advantage. The freedom, informality, and interplay that people enjoy allows them to act in the best interests of the company.

So, workers themselves can decide on a host of issues in their social interactions, such as the activities they work on, including their order and intensity; the frequency of their contacts; or their commitment to their responsibilities (Stryker and Serpe, 1982).

Management's job is to serve them so that they can carry out their work in a free and spirited manner and to link them to related stakeholders with whom they have an interdependent relationship. The unit of analysis is the practice itself, not a middle ground between individual coping and external control. No one knows the practice better than the practitioner who must in relation to others negotiate and arrange the objects of his or her own practice.

The study and development of leaderful practices will require a more process-oriented epistemology than our more common positivist methodologies that seek to explain phenomena from outside the observed system (Dewey, 1938; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). It will likely return us to the need to discover "the nature of managerial work" (from Mintzberg,

1973) not through analytic detachment as much as through practical engagement (Carroll, Levy, and Richmond, 2008). From this engaged vantage point, researchers can focus not only on the “doing” of management (Yanow, 2006) but also the “undoing” or “not doing.” We might ask, for example, what organizational conditions prevented people from serving as agents of change. Or we might ask how a dialogue among members of the team led to an overturn of a longstanding procurement policy.

Narrative forms of inquiry using thick description tend to look beyond the discovery of selected traits and behaviors that can explain leadership cum influence over followers. By focusing on individual action, our leadership models tend to presume a personal contingency perspective because of their focus on employees’ personality variables, such as their need for power or independence; on their level in the hierarchy; or on their values, such as their belief in participatory democracy (Miller and Monge, 1986; Vroom and Yetton, 1973). A focus on practices, on the other hand, introduces a range of alternative contingent variables, such as the social and cultural context within which leadership is occurring, the types of problems that the parties are working on, or the dynamics of the situation that are either enabling or constraining effective practice (Payne, 1976; Spillane, 2005).

We may find, as pointed out earlier, that the practices in a given entity have become coercive, such as through the use of information systems monitoring and surveillance. Whether or not external control through coercion or authority manifests itself as group conformity is dependent upon the willingness of the members of the entity to participate actively in both regular and spontaneous dialogue about contested views (Cludts, 1999). Indeed, being able to communicate one’s interest through civil dialogue free from coercion within a community of interest is the hallmark of a democratic order.

## Management's New Role

The subject of the end of managerial control can certainly pose a threat to management not only because of institutional pressures, including a denial of implicit theories of leadership placing the manager as the person in authority (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005; Lord, Brown, and Freiberg, 1999; Offerman, Kennedy, and Wirtz, 1994), but because it may suggest job elimination. If practice groups can direct themselves, they no longer need managers to control their aims and operation.

I contend that the withering of the control function can make way for a more critical set of managerial roles. Fisher (1999) advocates for a number of such roles, such as coach, business analyst, barrier buster, or customer advocate, which characterize team leaders, who as opposed to traditional supervisors locate themselves on the boundary of their self-directed work teams. As boundary managers they work *on* the system rather than *in* the system, paying attention to such issues as coordination problems with other teams, customers, and vendors; assessing market opportunities; or building communication bridges with community stakeholders.

I prefer the new term, *weaver*, used by organizers in the social network field (see, e.g., Honey, 2006; Krebs and Holley, 2002-2006; Plastrik and Taylor, 2004-2007; Raelin, 2010), rather than boundary manager to describe the role of the manager as support to the practice group. Weavers play a critical role not only in organizing networks but in sustaining them once formed. They also build social capital by mobilizing and documenting exchanges within the network. For example, they can point out where there are gaps in knowledge resources, where bottlenecks may be occurring within communication patterns, where access to new resources may be necessary, where special expertise may be required, or where clusters of connections may be formed from which the network can learn. Their

“authority,” however is not based on rules and regulations as it is on reliable service and trust.

Besides the weaver role, the other predominant role for managers is to serve as a facilitator of civil dialogue within – not outside of - the practice setting, precisely to overcome some of the nefarious self- and group-control devices, such as peer monitoring, often set in motion by group members themselves in deference to corporate expectations or to team conformity. Facilitators may engage in what Alvesson and Willmott (1992) refer to as “microemancipatory” projects, which can encourage the endorsement of a culture of learning and participation within these practices to head off the imposition of coercive norms that are either externally imposed or self-imposed. As noted earlier, these norms are often initiated based on generally accepted institutional practices to convey appropriateness, objectivity, and impartiality.

The facilitation role is dedicated to the development of independent and interdependent behavior that encourages increased autonomy and self-determination among learners (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Weibel, 2007). Malcolm Knowles (1980) referred to this form of development as andragogical, rather than pedagogical or teacher-directed. Andragogy encourages learners to be more capable of accepting greater levels of responsibility for their own and others’ actions and more reliable in their assessment of their own capacities and developmental needs. In andragogical practice, facilitators would model such behaviors as tolerance of ambiguity, openness and frankness, patience and suspension of judgment, empathy and unconditional positive regard, and commitment to learning. Eventually, the learners themselves would adopt some of these same behaviors, thus limiting the pro-activity of the facilitator.

To head off spontaneous and unplanned coercive behavior within the practice group, facilitators would seek to create a dialogic environment in which group members would become increasingly comfortable engaging in critical discourse. This form of discourse requires what is sometimes referred to as a focus on process – a conversation of validity checking in which members of the team would be encouraged to challenge not only the statements that they themselves as well as others make but also the assumptions they may be relying upon in producing the statements (Argyris, and Schön, 1974; Habermas, 1984). They become willing to face their own vulnerability that they may lose control, that their initial suppositions may turn out wrong, or that no solution may be found at least in the short term. They become receptive to what Alvin Gouldner (1970) once referred to as “hostile information,” or to data that run contrary to their comfortable stance. While becoming more willing to face critical scrutiny from others, they would concurrently be encouraged to advocate their own viewpoints, even those that might not be immediately accepted in their community. They would become willing to face the utter isolation that might come from ostracism from the group (Giddens, 1991).

It is expected that the dialogic community that is being described here would ultimately become sufficiently emancipatory to release members of the practice group from persistently restrictive institutional forces that limit personal control and autonomy (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Habermas, 1974). The dialogue may result in a critique of and even a change in the current power structure or, on the other hand, it may also result in a stabilization of the status quo. For example, it may privilege those who have superior communication skills, who have profound insights, or who can maintain a dispassionate demeanor rather than reveal raw uncivil emotions (Vince, 2002; Young, 2000). The end result could be the adoption of a molded or scripted self that comes to identify with the dominant performative culture

(Morgaine, 1994). Yet, it is the critique that is likely to be the outcome because facilitated dialogue examines and tries to upend the defensive routines that maintain hierarchical hegemony and stifle learning. Further, it is hoped that those who submit to their own even unwitting restrictions of voice through such means as self-surveillance, self-censorship, and self-discipline, would come to recognize their complicity in an oppressive social structure and learn to replace it with a system that would better represent their interests (Brookfield, 2001; Gramsci, 1995; Morrison and Milliken, 2003). Using their mutual reflection, imagination, and overall sense of fairness, they would learn to co-create their reality through their participation in making that reality what it is (Heron, 1992; Wenger, 1998).

## **Conclusion**

Although post-bureaucracy in concert with the information age has witnessed the increased capacity to centralize controlling information, it has concurrently seen the release of more advanced and humane forms of social interaction within the workforce based on increasingly spontaneous, overlapping, and inter-connected networks of activity. So, on one hand, managerial control will persist. Organization in its very essence speaks to our evolution in reproducing a disciplinary society. A post-structuralist stance also reveals that for every ounce of freedom extracted, we end up submitting ourselves to yet another form of control. On the other hand, we may be approaching an era when the unit of analysis in organizational life may flow to the domain of the practice and the practice team, set within a wider social network of experience. Although such a social setting will seek its own form of control, we have access to methodologies available to managers to promote and release a local democratic order.

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