1 Managing managers: the evolving management story in context

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The existence of an identifiable group of people who are labelled ‘managers’ has been one of the most significant aspects of the organization of work and society for well over a century. (Grey, 1999, p. 22)

The way organisations manage their managers is undergoing significant change. Despite this, it is a topic that has faced limited scholarly consideration. For decades, there was an ever-growing mountain of research on management that has moved our understanding forward, but much less attention has been paid to managers and less still to how they are themselves managed within organisations. This book attempts to fill this gap; it reviews the research conducted to date; and explores future research pathways. Our contribution is structured into 18 chapters; at the heart of each chapter is the notion that the world of managers has changed substantially since the ‘organization man’ of the 1950s. We have witnessed much excitement in the discussion about the future of management, with both pessimistic and optimistic views being put forward. Our attention was caught when, in the wake of delayering, downsizing, re-engineering and the pursuit of leanness, the more gloomy perspective gained currency in the popular managerial literature. Some indeed have pronounced the end of management.

Managers are the dinosaurs of our modern organizational ecology. The Age of Management is finally coming to close . . . (Cloe and Goldsmith, 2002, p. 3)

Some older studies of middle management in particular have suggested growing disillusionment and disaffection among managers, with discourse around ‘burnout’, ‘midcareer crisis’, the ‘managerial menopause’ (Hunt, 1982) and the ‘reluctant manager’ (Goffee and Scase, 1986; Scase and Goffee, 1989). The psychological contract between organisations and their managers is said to be threatened by frequent organisational restructuring and increasing uncertainty. Managerial workloads have changed, with not only greater volumes of work and sometimes-extravagant time constraints, but a broader range of tasks than previously, all while

under greater pressure to perform (Hassard et al., 2011). These pressures are commonly the result of the more widespread use of performance management measures and techniques.

Fortunately, we also uncovered a more optimistic scholarly view on middle and front-line managers and their future. This view provides suggestions and indications that roles are being transformed rather than replaced, and that the new organisational context has provided more demanding and thus interesting work, greater personal autonomy and increased skill levels (Redman et al., 1997).

Perhaps things are not so straightforward, and the reality is also likely to be very context sensitive (Tengblad, 2011). Other questions have been raised over the future role of the rational manager and the contemporary international manager's role. Are managers an endangered species despite the multitude of higher-education training in this field? Is there a correlation with downsizing, given that downsizing has been a widely practised yet contentious corporate strategy since the 1980s? In the relevant literature, it is seen as one of the preferred routes to turning around declining organisations, as it helps to cut costs and improve organisational performance (Mellahi and Wilkinson, 2009; Hassard et al., 2009), with the latter pointing to delayering more than to downsizing. But others argue that there is a complex and dynamic phenomenon, that is, a 'paradox of managerial downsizing': Littler and Innes (2003, 2004) contend that, despite the widespread promotion of such downsizing as an organisational strategy, the number and ratio of managers appear to have grown in recent years. In this sense, their analysis suggests that, at least in part, it is with the pursuit of the thin ideal as a corporate aesthetic – with a culture rather than simply a structure of leanness (Tyler and Wilkinson, 2007) – that many corporations have become preoccupied. Is a 'tyranny of corporate slenderness', engendered by delayering and downsizing corporations, perhaps a Western phenomenon, most evident in the USA and the UK, as well as in Europe and Australasia, as Garsten and Grey (1997, p. 214) suggested? It is not surprising that this argumentation feeds into a narrative about the experience of, and future for, managers. It is the setting in which this book takes its starting point.

A common line of argument (see Redman et al., 1997), at least in the West, was that most managers saw their career as the primary interest in their life. Single-income families were the norm, with the male as the breadwinner. The expansion of managerial hierarchies meant that career ambitions were generally realisable. A 'psychological contract' existed between the manager, his family and the organisation, involving a clear division of labour in the home, and a high level of commitment from the manager to the organisation, in return for job security and career

prospects (Whyte, 1960). But this psychological contract has disintegrated under the pressure of organisational restructuring and a loss of job security and stability (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995; Heckscher, 1995; Hassard et al. 2009). The effect of this is that managers may react by becoming more 'instrumental' in their attitude (Goffee and Scase, 1986, p. 3). Thus 'organization man' of the mid-twentieth century (Whyte, 1960) may have been replaced by 'reluctant managers' in the last decades of the century (Scase and Goffee, 1989) and the pressured managers of modern times (Townsend and Russell, 2013).

As the twentieth century came to a close and the twenty-first century began, a growing number of dual-career couples and changing social attitudes towards the domestic division of labour have contributed to further entrenching the changing attitudes towards the structure and performance of managerial work (see Redman et al., 1997, pp. 101–3). But is this an accurate reflection of empirical evidence or is it an accumulation of anecdotes? McDonald et al. (2013) note that, despite pressures and public debate around work–life balance (and similarly named concepts), productivity and performance continue to take precedence over the potential for the re-organisation of work. Has the role of managers been – or can it be – transformed? Would or could it be replaced? Are managers increasingly pursuing their careers by moving between organisations? Does one manager equal another, in function, knowledge, performance and adaptability to contexts?

We uncovered considerable debate about the nature of change governing the role and function of the manager, of the contextual change bringing the role new challenges, and the implications for careers and organisations, and the way in which managers themselves are being managed (Watson, 1994). This debate is taking place in a variety of research streams, and we thus decided to open up the following analyses to multidisciplinary. Evidently, there is always a danger of exaggerating the change in managers' roles (Townsend and Russell, 2013; Hales, 2002, 2005) such that we may be moving rather more slowly to 'knowledge intensive and flexible, non-hierarchical, network and project-based formats' (Alvesson, 2013, p. 135). Specifically, the contemporary debates start to centre increasingly on the role of managers in 'value-adding' activities or, alternatively, the way managers contribute positively or negatively to productivity, performance, profitability and competitiveness. This is directly dependent on the way in which managers are managed.

The research agenda in this field is open and this book aims to make a substantial contribution, as a starting point in filling this significant gap in the literature. The various strands of international management literature have still to pay attention to the many issues of how to manage managers

in the modern international firm. In this climate, cognitive, administrative, strategic and authoritative power shifts (Verbeke, 2013, p. 311) inevitably prevail in an adjustment to the international competitive, often disparate yet interlinked, environment, in which functionality needs to be redefined, often towards greater interdependence. Managers and their management seem to fit in a zone of neglect where multiple disciplines pay some, but minimal, attention to understanding.

Organisation capabilities are directly dependent on the management of managers. The most notable contemporary piece on this topic can be found in Verbeke (2013), in which he reiterates Prahalad and Doz's reflection on the strategic control and organisational change impact of managers and their management, from a perspective wider than traditionally used in human resources literature, and more integrated into the reflection of international business theory. Such an approach expands the understanding of organisational context and culture, in that strategic control potentially reaches into subsidiaries abroad, change issues and solutions are shared and internationalisation of knowledge feeds through the organisation at home and abroad, thus creating an internal multinational corporation network. Scholarly research is thus capable of inquiring more profoundly into the functionalities and models for managing managers that corporations adopt, and can consequently make a yet greater contribution through theorising. This book aims to provide a basis for such an endeavour.

In the initial proposal that sought contributors to this book, we asked authors to aim for two key objectives within their chapters on specific research viewpoints and explorations of the way in which managers are managed. One was to outline the terrain – to give the reader an understanding of 'what we already know' in their particular area of expertise. The second was to ask the authors to go beyond historical and contemporary debates and investigations, and to offer suggestions about what the future research agenda might be within their field. From the submissions, we have compiled 18 chapters grouped into four parts that allow the reader to explore the most relevant research insights into 'managing managers'.

Part I of the book sets the scene, placing the evolving management experience in context. Part II addresses processes applied to managers within organisational boundaries. Part III considers the most crucial topics currently cutting across the role of managers. Part IV then picks up on the main contemporary issues and debates about new directions in management ideas and practice, especially in a global world.

Importantly, many issues may pervade organisations but also increasingly reach across national borders and organisational boundaries. As an acknowledgement of this research and business reality, we have

drawn together a range of authors from various relevant disciplinary backgrounds. We have chapters from labour historians, theoreticians, industrial relations scholars, sociologists, organisational psychologists, geographers, policy advisers and economists. In drawing together this diverse group, the simple brief allowed the authors the freedom to develop their chapters as they deemed appropriate and most relevant.

We now turn to a brief summary of each chapter.

In Chapter 2, McDonnell focuses on the topic of ‘talent management’. This area of research, though in its infancy, is evolving at a rapid pace, becoming increasingly important to human resource practitioners and to organisations aware of the challenges they face in recruiting and retaining managerial and professional talent. The chapter reviews the key developments and debates taking place, and argues that there is still much to be done in engaging with the phenomenon. McDonnell proposes a number of research areas and questions, and calls for an increase in empirical studies that employ a rigorous research design to gain further understanding of talent management and its impact on individual and organisational outcomes.

‘Managerial remuneration’, while a narrow field of study, attracts a great deal of attention, particularly in the public domain. Issues around remuneration are increasing as economic deregulation, globalisation and financial downturns take effect on security and relative earnings. Perkins (Chapter 3) focuses on how, under contracts of employment, individuals receive ‘consideration’ in return for making their time, skills and experience available to an employer, and the range of reward and benefit approaches available in return. He examines various perspectives on problems in managing managers’ remuneration to help build an understanding of the issues and the ways the relevant requirements have come to be specified.

Bozionelos and Baruch (Chapter 4) discuss the difficulties associated with managing the careers of managers. They state that the complex nature of managerial work requires careful planning in the long and short terms. The responsibility for ‘career management and future leadership’ should therefore fall equally between the employer and manager through the development of a well-designed career management system to accommodate and harmonise both sets’ needs. The authors propose future research directions considering the impact of technological advancement, the thinning of managerial ranks and firms’ responsibilities towards managing the careers of managers. The authors consider, from a positivist perspective, that managers are crucially important for employers, who thus need to share the responsibility of career management instead of letting it fall on the shoulders of managers to manage by themselves.

Sander and Caza (Chapter 5) examine the importance of developing the innovative manager, thus shedding light on the previously discussed transformation of managers' roles. The innovative manager role has become indispensable in fostering employee creativity and has become a key leadership priority for organisations. The authors provide insight into how innovation is affected by differing contexts and organisational conditions. They explain the distinctive qualities that innovative managers need to influence 'employee creativity', as well as the role that senior leadership plays in the development of these managers. They highlight that there is less research and understanding of what it takes to develop an innovative manager as they progress upwards within the organisation, and suggest important directions for future research.

An analysis of the role of the front-line manager (FLM) is the focus of the chapter by Townsend and Kellner (Chapter 6). The authors acknowledge the critical nature of the FLM role and its relationship with overall 'organisational performance' – a role that has transitioned from a supervisory function to one with increased administrative and employee management responsibilities. While there has been confusion and debate around the terminology ascribed to the role, Townsend and Kellner provide clarity in their development of a concise classification of the role of the FLM. Further, they discuss how FLMs can best be managed within the complexity of the role to ensure effective performance in line with organisational expectations and strategies.

Dent (Chapter 7) discusses how professions should be managed. While professionals have historically enjoyed the privilege of autonomy and the ability to self-manage, this has proved challenging for managers due to their limited ability to exert control and manage the performance of this group. However, with the growth of the management function within professional practice, it is now important to coordinate the work of these specialists in light of increased competition and costs. Consequently, management work is being undertaken by professionals themselves, in what Dent describes as a 'hybrid' role, resulting in the reconfiguration of responsibilities between managers and professionals.

Tourish (Chapter 8) explores the strengths and weaknesses of evidence-based management (EBM) and the critiques and debates the concept has attracted. Tourish remarks that, while social constructionist critiques of EBM have emerged to challenge the privilege of management voice and the commitment to best practice, he finds this perspective to be somewhat misguided. He argues that a critical realist perspective can offer a better alternative for providing a rich epistemological insight into the search for evidence, meaning and theory in organisation studies, and calls for a shift from EBM to 'evidence-based organising'. He fears that EBM will be seen

as just another management fad, and a move towards a more organisationally focused perspective is fundamental for reorienting future discussion.

Tengblad and Vie (Chapter 9) deal with the question of what current managerial work practices realistically and practically look like, while analysing the commonalities of the tasks and activities managers perform across different settings. The authors describe the differences between the reality and normative expectations of management roles, the stability of management work across time, national culture, functional difference and gender, the informal aspects of managerial work in the context of legitimacy, and the presence of political and emotional factors. While they point to a long legacy of management research, pure description of management processes, they argue, is not sufficient: The authors state that management research would benefit from closer links with experienced practitioners in the field, and call for the ‘development of a practice theory’ to facilitate this.

Billsberry’s chapter (Chapter 10) focuses on the dilemma that management educators face when approached to give practical advice to managers. Billsberry highlights this as problematic, as the ability to provide such advice is limited by the nature of academic teaching and its theory-driven approach. This contribution describes this as ‘the crisis in management education’. Billsberry explores the aspects of the dilemma that occurs as a result of the current separation between academic and practical organisational experiences. The chapter considers various solutions, and suggests that a paradigmatic shift should occur, transcending and integrating previous arguments to develop new and applied ways of teaching in the field.

Lightfoot (Chapter 11) focuses on the role of business schools and their part in preparing students for careers in business and management; in understanding what organisations are expecting from graduates, and in expectations regarding research on developing economies. The chapter brings recent discussion to light, suggesting that the current design of business schools has led to challenges for business and society, and may be the cause of problems with the level of moral and ethical responsibility of graduate managers. Lightfoot suggests that business schools have the opportunity to reconsider the role they play in the development of society, to redefine management education in broader, more inclusive terms, and to enable better adaption to the evolving demands of markets.

Chauvel and Poulingue (Chapter 12) discuss the increasing need for a new breed of manager – one who is able to steer both the potential of human versus organisational knowledge and maintain operational efficiency. In doing so, this new type of manager will need to acquire different skills and a new management style in order to represent an organisation’s dynamic resources and to develop subordinates. The authors consider

how this managerial imperative will affect the way managers themselves should be managed in the context of the knowledge era, and offer a range of insights and suggestions for the development of further theoretical and practical research.

McDonald and Cathcart (Chapter 13) bring much-needed attention to understanding the 'manager-centred' approach to managing work-life phenomena in organisational settings. They focus on the extent to which line managers promote and/or support organisational work-life agendas beyond the manager-subordinate dyad. They consider a range of organisational-level (as well as regulatory) phenomena that can constrain, facilitate or otherwise affect a line manager's conduct in relation to work-life issues. They focus on how managers themselves face challenges in facilitating their own work-life balance. Therefore further research is proposed in order to understand manager-centred approaches to work-life agendas and to address the disjuncture between organisational policy and initiatives, and the everyday experiences of workers within all occupational and hierarchical levels.

Kaminska and Toustou (Chapter 14) observe that managers are finding it increasingly difficult to manage in a world characterised by the acceleration of knowledge production and the global sourcing of knowledge creation and social networks, all of which are contributing to a rapidly changing and complex world, where competitive advantage is increasingly difficult to sustain. The authors discuss the importance that the roles of creativity and innovation play in ensuring sustained organisational performance. While costly and difficult to manage, these processes are critical in ensuring the longevity of individual organisations and the growth of global economies. The authors therefore argue that managing diversity as well as employee cognitive diversity has become increasingly important for enabling organisations to adjust to rapidly changing market situations.

Jackson (Chapter 15) discusses the management of managers across different cultural contexts and the interrelated issue of dealing with the resultant ethical issues as a subset of associated cultural values. He explains that differences in ethicality have not been fully explored and highlights that further guidance is required to be informed about the ethical values and actions prevalent within cultural contexts, and to understand how issues should be managed. Jackson provides a starting point for research and raises many questions from the classical cross-cultural management literature (e.g. Hofstede, 1980) in considering contemporary issues in resolving ethical dilemmas regarding management techniques.

Kramar (Chapter 16) explores the roles of women in management and their employment in managerial positions. The author indicates

that, even though women's educational attainment and participation in the labour market have risen, women continue to be underrepresented in management-level positions and overrepresented in lower-level jobs. Factors affecting this phenomenon are complex and can result from both demand- and supply-side factors, as well as cultural, institutional and structural factors. While change is occurring at macro, mesa, individual and group levels, technological advancement will see a further reduction of middle-management positions and will affect future employment opportunities for women (as well as men).

Agarwal, Bajada, Brown and Green (Chapter 17) note that the literature has identified significant variations in both management practices and measures of productivity across countries. The authors suggest that such variation in management practices may be partially explained by each country's stage of economic development and the associated contemporaneous macro-environment. They propose and find tentative evidence for a stage of economic development life cycle of management practice (LCMP) hypothesis, in order to offer insights into how changes in the economic, social and regulatory environments affect management practices. Their findings have implications for managers, practitioners, policy makers and other stakeholders, and provide guidance on the context and benefits for firms adopting innovative management practices. They also highlight a role for government policy in shaping the macro-environment to support advances in management capability and firm productivity.

In the final chapter of this volume (Chapter 18), Kar, Varma and Suder widen the reader's horizon towards an understanding of how managers are being managed in developing and emerging countries, taking this macro-environmental context into the centre of the discussion. The authors find that developing-country firms, no matter their origin and ownership, are part of a transition that requires managers and their own management to adapt to very rapid contextual change that is all-encompassing, multi-layered and induces uncertainty among team members. Because local contextual imperatives defy the direct transposition of the generalist management teaching of developed-country models, which still constitutes the essence of managing managers literature, this chapter calls for ongoing research into the specificities of managing managers in the variety of contexts that characterises international business management.

This book encompasses the analysis of many complementary features of how managers – and their management – evolves. From career evolution to transformation management issues, the reader will gain insights into the literature and future scholarly avenues as regards employee creativity, organisation performance dependencies, the development of more and more hybrid types of managers, and the emergence of an

‘evidence-based organising’ mechanism. Our authors also review both teaching and learning as well as research and literature, calling for adaptations to the reality by development of a practice theory and of increasingly appropriate management training that includes considerations of business schools for their graduates’ impact on society. The book then broadens the context towards a better understanding of the manager in the contemporary knowledge era, with its work–life balance debates and social networking focus. Ethical issues, as a subset of associated cultural values, are as crucial an issue for managing managers as is the gender equality question – in particular if there is a future reduction of middle-management positions. The two concluding chapters (Chapters 17 and 18) consider various international environments that shape the way in which managers are managed.

The manager is the core of the organisation – its efficiencies, its performance and its adaptability to the international marketplace. This book reveals how scholarly literature assesses the phenomenon of manager management, in the past and in the present. It sets the scene for its future theorisation agenda and relevance.

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