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Some Personal and Political Reflections on Critical Management Education

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Chris Grey (in this volume) characterizes his contribution as a ‘personal account’ that is situated within a political and historical context (see Reynolds and Vince; Hodgson, both in this volume). Grey’s concern is to connect the ‘personal’ (e.g., what actually matters to a person, and not what s/he would like to believe matters) with the ‘political’ (e.g., how time and power infuse social realities, including the construction of the ‘personal’)ⁱ. Making this connection is, I suggest, a defining feature and intent of Critical Management Education (CME). History, culture and politics infuse the processes through which personal change-as-learning is enabled (how ‘what matters’ changes), and resistance to such change is weakened or overcome (Reynolds and Vince, in this volume).

A second, related feature of CME is the fusion of innovative pedagogy with critical content, including that provided by Critical Management Studies (CMS) (Alvesson and Willmott, 2012; Adler, Forbes and Willmott, 2007; Alvesson, Bridgman and Willmott, 2009) in which learning processes are oriented to facilitating social justice. Distinguished by an affinity with ‘more democratic, less hierarchical values’ (Reynolds and Vince, p. XX in this volume), CME is, in principle, anti-authoritarian in content and mode of delivery. It may be tempting

therefore to make a sharp and clear distinction between CME and ‘othered’, established forms of management education. Yet, it is more credible, I believe, to imagine a continuum of possibilities - possibilities that are prompted, enabled and constrained within particular historical, cultural and political contexts.

As I have written quite extensively on CME (Contu and Willmott, 2001; Grey, Knights and Willmott, 1996; Willmott, 1994, 1997a, 1997b, 2003), I will endeavour not to repeat myself here. Instead, I will draw upon my personal experience and knowledge of how ‘critical’ has come to be present, and is presented, in management education. It will become obvious that my reflections are UK-centric and largely confined to research-intensive business schools, so this ethnocentrism and privileged standpoint should also be borne in mind. I also draw attention to the danger of understanding ‘critical’ as ‘negative’ - in the sense of unconstructive or even destructive rather than facilitating emancipatory change through critique. Without succumbing to conspiracy theory, equating ‘critical’ with ‘negative’ offers a way of discrediting critical thinking, and thereby protecting the status quo. That said, criticism may degenerate into cynicism and contempt that are intellectually wanting substitutes for critique. When engaging in CME, the recurrent challenge is to respect and practice the emancipatory ideals of democratization and social justice, including climate justice. As exponents of CME, the task is to devise and develop ways of articulating and fulfilling its personal/political, emancipatory ideals, albeit that the process of their realization will be imperfect or partial, especially in conditions not entirely conducive to its application.

What follows draws upon personal experience and is somewhat idiosyncratic. The next section considers one source of CME that emerged in the early 1970s that I experienced directly as an undergraduate, and then contributed to as a postgraduate and lecturer. I then

address what I take to be the ‘what’, the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of CME before considering what CME means in practice. I explore an example of ‘critical thinking’ and ‘dialogical pedagogy’ recently introduced as a first year undergraduate module at Bayes Business School. Finally, I offer some broader reflections on CME today.

ENCOUNTERING CME

My first encounter with what is now identified as CME occurred when I was an undergraduate (and then a postgraduate) at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST). Prior to its renaming as the Manchester School of Management in 1996, I was a student in the Department of Management Sciences. It was there, twenty years later, when I returned as a lecturer, that my path first crossed with Chris Grey (Grey, in this volume) who was studying for a PhDⁱⁱ.

The Department of Management Sciences had been established in 1965 as the first undergraduate management department in the UK. When an undergraduate in the department during the late 1960s and early 1970s, lectures and seminars were, in general, delivered in a highly conventional way. Students were expected to bank and regurgitate their orthodox content, including standard criticisms of it (see Sliwa, in this volume). The Manchester Business School (MBS) was also established in the late 1960s (renamed the Alliance Business School in 2015). Based in Manchester University (not UMIST), MBS concentrated on MBA education and the provision of more vocational, post-experience courses. The Department of Management Sciences, in contrast, occupied the undergraduate supplemented by the postgraduate niches.

This educational ecology was, in my view, an important condition of possibility for a source of CME, as described by Grey (in this volume), that emerged in the Department of Management Sciences, and subsequently disseminated through the teaching and pedagogical writings of numerous alumni, - including those who contributed chapters to the textbook, *Introducing Organizational Behaviour and Management*, edited by David Knights and myself - who had been PhD students or researchers in the department (e.g. Joanna Brewis, Alessia Contu, David Collinson, Chris Grey, Damian O'Doherty, Glenn Morgan, Pam Odih, Andrew Sturdy, Theo Vurdubakis, Edward Wray-Bliss, etc), and who went on to make substantial contributions to CMSⁱⁱⁱ. To elaborate briefly on the ecology of management education in Manchester, whereas MBS staff were more closely engaged with practitioners and consultancy, many of those in the Department of Management Sciences were recruited from social science disciplines and were comparatively more research-focused. My firm impression, as an undergraduate, and later as a PhD student, was that the ethos of the Management Sciences department was more similar to that of social sciences and humanities departments, from which many of its staff had been drawn, than to a prototypical UK 'business school' exemplified by MBS. Notably, core elements of the undergraduate programme resembled a multidisciplinary degree. Four of six of the first-year courses were Sociology, Psychology, Economics and Social and Economic History.

It was perhaps important for a fledgling management department situated in UMIST to gain some legitimacy by hiring staff from social science departments, and by designing a foundation year based upon intellectually established, semi-respectable subjects. The second year and third courses became more recognizably 'for management' (e.g., Accounting, Finance, Marketing, etc.), but students could graduate by taking courses that were non-managerialist, or even openly anti-managerialist (e.g., more Sociology and Psychology as

well as Labour Economics, Industrial Relations, etc). Roughly speaking, my undergraduate cohort divided 70/30 between two (unofficial) pathways, and this split remained in the 1990s when I returned to what was to become MSM. The first pathway could be dubbed ‘study *for* management’ and the second ‘study *of* management’ and partially ‘*against* management’ – a spirit that resonated with the economic decline and industrial conflicts of the times. It was in the latter pathway that elements of CME, which Chris Grey encountered in the 1990s (Grey, in this volume), were evident.

At MBS, a distinctive pedagogy had also developed that bore a family resemblance to some features of CME. It involved ‘learning by doing’ known as the ‘Manchester Method’. It sought to subordinate and harness theory to the improvement of practice, but with minimal reflexivity about what counted as ‘improvement’ or why (see Cunliffe, in this volume)^{iv}. Reflexivity was limited to enhancing the means of management control without much reflection on the conditions for achieving such improvement, or the legitimacy of the ends. Shared by CME and the ‘Manchester Method’, nonetheless, is a strong measure participative engagement by students in learning lessons from their personal and/or work experience. Despite some overlap in pedagogy, however, the relevance and value of theory in the ‘Manchester Method’ is confined to its demonstrable benefit in making incremental improvements to established practice.

Compared to the ‘Manchester Method’, CME, including how it emerged at the MSM, is less directly oriented to improving managerial performance than other performative concerns such as social justice. CME may, nonetheless, yield challenging insights into how, for example, board decision-making, or indeed how ‘learning by doing’, is socially accomplished or impeded through complex and shifting relations of power and domination. To its

exponents, CME has the potential to be of greater practical, social relevance and public value (widely conceived) than other, 'uncritical', forms of management education, not least because it offers a way of deepening and deconstructing our 'understanding of relationships – work, personal, social' (Cunliffe: XX, in this volume; see also Knights and Willmott, 1999). CMS and CME are each attentive to often unappreciated intricacies and unintended consequences of everyday managing practices - as illustrated by the Masters student who Hodgson (in this volume, p. XX) reports to have experienced the ostensibly supportive efforts of other learning set members to be 'profoundly uncomfortable and ultimately threatening'. Her 'difference', manifest in a low level of online participation, was felt to be (uncritically) disrespected by other members of the set, resulting in her feeling tormented and precipitating her further withdrawal. For the potential of critical thinking to be fulfilled, rather than selectively appropriated to provide quick fixes for performance improvement, it is necessary to leverage as well as nurture conducive conditions.

The emergence of a source of CME at MSM was, I have conjectured, associated with two conditions that were absent at MBS. First, the recruitment of many staff more interested in communicating and developing their disciplines than with 'developing' managers or 'improving' management practice. Relatedly, MSM staff were teaching undergraduates and masters students, not MBAs or post-experience students. As second factor that, with the passage of time, can be overlooked, is how, in the 1970s, state grants supported the very small fraction of school leavers who went to University. For graduates, getting a job as a management trainee or equivalent was virtually guaranteed, especially for those studying ostensibly vocational degrees such as 'Management Sciences'. Students had yet to become debt-funded 'customers', and there was little 'customer demand' and limited staff interest in providing content or 'skills' deemed relevant for the employment market. Students were, in

my experience, treated as junior members of the departmental 'College'. Some of my closest associates took full advantage of this inclusive, collegial ethos by, paradoxically, absenting themselves from lectures to pursue other interests, and then bombed in their exams. They were duly transferred from the honours to the ordinary degree track, but without any evident sense of failure or disgrace. Like those who received lower second or third class honours degrees, students receiving ordinary degrees walked into good jobs.

It was during my undergraduate third year, when taking courses that combined heterodox content with a dialogical mode of inquiry, that I experienced what today would be identified as CME. Several courses taken in the previous two years had 'critical' content, notably Industrial Sociology which, despite its highly didactic delivery, inspired me with its forensic, searing analysis of sociological classics such as Selznick's masterful *TVA and the Grass Roots* as well as its withering, anti-managerialist assessment of 'Cow Sociology'. But CME was encountered principally, though not exclusively, in a course led by a recently recruited lecturer, David Knights, who was strongly committed to student engagement and 'student-centred learning'. Substantively, the course included political theory, political economy, political sociology and political philosophy^v but its radically dialogical mode of delivery was its most distinguishing and challenging feature. Later, as a PhD student, I tutored and contributed to the evolution of this course that became titled, somewhat euphemistically, *Work, Industry and Society* (see Grey, in this volume).

After completing my PhD in Manchester in 1977, I was appointed to a lectureship at Aston Business School where I continued to apply a 'critical' approach to my teaching of undergraduates and postgraduates as I sought to emulate what I had experienced and developed at UMIST. During this time, I continued to work closely with David Knights,

including on pedagogically relevant ideas that appeared in *Management Lives* (Knights and Willmott, 1999). I returned to the Department of Management Sciences in the mid-1980s. It was one of three institutions, along with Lancaster and London Business School, that received a top rating (5*) in the 1992 and 1996 Research Assessment Exercises (RAEs, later to become REFs). This was important as it placed the department in a strong position to attract highly ‘research active’ staff in areas such as accounting (e.g. David Cooper, Mahmood Ezzamel, Keith Robson) and information systems (e.g. Brian Bloomfield), as well as in management and organization studies. Their ‘critical’, non-managerialist approach to research spilled over into the content of their courses and, to a lesser degree, their pedagogy (see Kevill and Mariana Estrada-Robles in this volume on teaching entrepreneurialism critically).

The reference to the RAEs and, in particular, the inclusion of Lancaster amongst the few 5* departments in the early Exercises is, arguably, significant and not coincidental. Like MSM, Lancaster’s strong research performance, and the importance of its protection for future funding as well as reputation, helped resist pressures to become a “cash cow” through an expansion of teaching activity. In addition to appointing ‘critical’ staff and fostering ‘critical’ thinking - notably articulated in Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan’s highly influential *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis* - the Management School at Lancaster was the home of a humanistic, ‘action learning’ variant CME that, over time, became more ‘critical’ in orientation. This was spearheaded in the Department of Management Learning by the commitment of John Burgoyne, Michael Reynolds and colleagues to both teaching innovation and scholarship (see Reynolds and Vince, in this volume). PhD alumni of UMIST as well as Lancaster have been involved in seeding versions of CME elsewhere. As Judi Marshall (in this volume) relates, when she was a PhD student in the Department of

Management Sciences, her exposure to experiential (as contrasted to didactic, cognitive) learning, in the form of a T-group with its unsettling revelation of ‘multiple ways of knowing’, meant, in her words, that ‘life could never be the same again’ (Marshall, p. XX, in this volume; see also Reynolds and Vince, in this volume).

CME

CME involves challenging received wisdoms (e.g., those presented in mainstream textbooks and journal articles) and, in the classroom, deviating from the traditional, “sage on the stage”, approach in which knowledge is banked rather than critically and interpersonally interrogated. It is oriented to political (societal) as well as personal transformation that moves in the direction of ‘more just, free and equitable conditions’ by combining and integrating ‘critical and collective action’ (Fenwick, 2005: 31 cited in Sliwa, p. XX in this volume). CME exposes students to intellectual sources that are absent from mainstream accounts of management, such as the writings of Marx or Foucault on the nature and means of management control. These provide a radically different framing of mainstream topics as they place in question notions of ‘organization’ or ‘management’ as (reified) entities: it re-imagines such entities as, for example, multiple sets of interlocking processes (Tomkins, in this volume). CME enables students to appreciate how power relations mediate experiential (e.g., emotionally disturbing and challenging) processes of knowing and learning in ways that are intended to be personally illuminating and liberating.

CME also advocates an interactive educational experience that is not necessarily welcomed by students accustomed to a more familiar and predictable pedagogy. Exponents of CME differ on the ethics of how much and how far to challenge and unsettle students existentially

as well as cognitively, but there is widespread scepticism about, if not revulsion towards, the authoritarianism of Gradgrind^{vi} pedagogy. There is a shared interest in experimenting with more participative, dialogical pedagogies that, it can be expected, may have some lasting, existential impact upon participants, as affirmed by Judi Marshall's testimony that 'life could never be the same again'. The concern to engage a pedagogy capable of transforming the 'subjectivity' of students ('the personal') differentiates exponents of CME/CMS from other critically minded management academics who adopt a more 'instructional', 'objective' approach^{vii} in which 'the political' is addressed in ways that barely touches the subjectivity of students.

CME brings to consciousness consequences of un-reflexivity that are inadequately recognized (Cunliffe, in this volume) but can be, and frequently are, personally and politically challenging (see Mughal, in this volume). It questions the widely held, yet seldom doubted, objectivist assumption that it is possible to mirror or 'capture' the reality of management by eliminating sources of subjective bias (Rorty, 1980). This faith in objectivism is challenged as it acts to discredit analysis that ignores how 'the reality of management' and knowledge of that reality (e.g. CMS) are products of power-invested interpretive frameworks. Exemplified by 'evidence-based management', the beguiling, seemingly scientific claims of mainstream management education are seen to legitimize the continuing pursuit of largely unquestioned ends (such as profitable growth; shareholder value; value for money). Or, to take another example, the presuppositions of the educational mission of UN's Principles for Responsible Management (PRME) are regarded, from a CME/CMS perspective, to 'inhibit *critical* reflexivity' with regard to the purpose and responsibility of management (Cunliffe, in this volume; also Millar and Price, 2018). It is to

the liberation of this purpose and the embracing of responsibility with regard to people and planet that CME/CMS is dedicated.

DOING CME

Gjerde (in this volume) relates the experience of organizing a workshop for a group of leadership directors and consultants responsible for leadership development programmes (she had previously been one). She encouraged them to reflect upon their practice by introducing them to critical leadership research, with the hope of transforming their understanding. Initially, there was evidence of some cognitive receptiveness and widening of horizons. Two and a half years later, however, only a small minority of participants reported that the workshop had resulted in any substantive change to their leadership development programmes. Plausibly enough, Gjerde attributes the limited effects of the workshop to the material and ideological conditions of the participants' workplaces where relevance and impact of KPIs was prioritized, not reflection on the theory and practice of leadership, even in relation to KPI fulfilment. Encouraging the participants to *think* differently (at the one day workshop) about leadership was demanding enough for the participants. *Doing* something different as a leadership director or consultant was found to be considerably more onerous, personally and politically. The limited impact of the workshop provokes reflection on the receptiveness of the context in which the participants worked and, more specifically, on how relations of power routinely operate to impede the translation of theory into embedded practice.

A lesson to be derived from such experience is that working to foster a *conducive context* of practice is necessary if practitioners are to 'challenge ideals, assumptions and practices' when

they return to their organizations (Gjerde, p. XX in this volume). Exposure to critical ideas, and allowing enough time to explore (and challenge) their practical relevance, is necessary but it is insufficient. If the ideas are to take root, then ‘personal’ engagement (e.g., by Gjerde’s workshop participants) must be complemented by the development of *supportive conditions* in which the ideas are seeded and fulfilled. This requirement is difficult for CME educators to fulfil as they/we have limited means *as academics* of influencing those conditions. In the absence of enabling conditions, practitioners who are unsettled by the insights of CME and CMS are more likely to ‘exit’ their organizations than ‘voice’ their concerns by attempting to initiate change (Marshall, in this volume). But they may then take on new roles in which they are better able to create or develop the conditions required to think and act differently. Likewise, for educators, it is important to establish and defend conditions supportive of CME. In the context of higher education, this includes protecting and expanding periods for the updating of course content and modes of delivery that, otherwise, are vulnerable to being squeezed by pressures to undertake administrative tasks or engage in activities directed at producing ‘research outputs’ (Kars-Unluoglu and Mangion-Thornley, in this volume).

Given the challenges associated with CME, it is inspiring to read the account of doing CME provided by Zulfiqar and Prasad (in this volume) in which they describe an exercise conducted with students in a private business school in the Global South that was designed to provoke reflexivity about their (taken for granted) class privilege. An indicator of this privilege was their access to private toilets and their disgust or apprehension at the prospect of sharing a toilet. Aware of this anxiety, Zulfiqar and Prasad prompted students to reflect on the ‘personal’ issue and the ‘political’ question of how they related to (‘untouchable’) toilet cleaners. The exercise was intended to bring to consciousness how social inequalities are

routinely naturalized (and dissembled), and how the taken-for-grantedness of inequality might be disrupted and undone. It required students to prepare a written personal reflection on whether or not they empathised with toilet cleaners; what difficulties this could pose; and whether their experience was gendered or intertwined with other politics. One of the authors also prepared a reflection on her own experience that was shared with students. This included reference to the relevance of her migration to the US where she did her own cleaning. Students were then required to undertake an in-depth, semi-structured interview with a cleaner.

Two years later, the students were surveyed to assess whether the exercise had any enduring, consciousness-raising outcomes. A majority reported that they had been shocked by what they had learned (e.g., about how the breaching of toilet workers' rights was widespread and invisible as well as about their own preconceptions and fears). Many students' behaviour had changed as they now acknowledged, rather than ignored, the presence of toilet cleaners and talked to them. For the students who responded to the survey, the exercise was reportedly consciousness-changing. Less clear is whether this change is intelligible as a firm, if small, step in the direction of reducing oppression and inequality, or if the 'change' is a means of decreasing the dissonance between their previous treatment of cleaners as invisible 'untouchables', and an emergent awareness of them as human beings. Did this awareness act as the equivalent of a Human Relations philosophy of management that bestows a measure of recognition on subjugated workers that reproduces, rather than challenges or transforms, the status quo of class (or caste) privilege? Or might it be extended and amplified by students to challenge the very structure of privilege and associated manifestations of social inequality? Could the ostensibly personal become overtly political?

A CASE OF CME?: ‘CRITICAL THINKING’

I now consider how elements of CME are present, or not, in the content and pedagogy of a first year undergraduate course recently introduced at Bayes (formerly Cass) Business School. I do this to reflect upon how comparatively innovative pedagogy and ‘critical thinking’ can be pursued without necessarily delivering CME.

The compulsory first year ‘Critical Thinking’ module incorporates elements resembling the intent and means of CME. It applies Problem-Based Learning (PBL) (see Appendix) involving self-directed small groups facilitated by instructors and guided by ‘discussion leaders’ drawn by module organizers from student members of the group. Initially a single introductory lecture was given to introduce the module and to prepare students for its problem-based learning approach, although, in response to student feedback (*aka* complaints), this was later supplemented by two additional lectures (Rich, Brown & Banerjee, 2019). The title of the module, ‘Critical Thinking’, which is retained here, was also changed to ‘Critical Analysis for Business’, but without any substantive change of content, presumably in order to improve its acceptability by carrying the expectation that it should be ‘*for* Business’, rather than for any broader purpose. In the textbook for the module, titled *Critical Thinking*, central importance is given to ‘thinking carefully about the process of thinking itself’ (Chatfield, 2018: 6). The ‘values and attitudes’ explicitly attributed to the module include a CMS/CME-resonant concern to ‘[d]emonstrate an appreciation of ethical issues as they relate to both the business world and the world in general’ (Module Information) although, as noted, the latter is absent from the change of module title. Where PBL differs markedly from the dialogical form of CME is in its highly structured pedagogical

approach and the narrowness of the range of ideas or thoughts that are to be ‘carefully’ thought about^{viii}.

I focus upon this example of a version of ‘CME’ (note the scare quotes) to illustrate how some elements that I attribute to CME – notably, the importance of critical thinking, reflection and interaction - have been adopted and translated in an effort to reform established business school curricula. Yet, when endeavouring to develop students whose thinking is less ‘uncritical’, there is a risk of a kind of ‘CME-washing’. This is, of course, ironic and comedic as the declared intention of the Critical Thinking module is to enable students to detect and debunk disingenuousness. Such debunking is, arguably, less likely to occur if critical thinking is conflated with, and restricted to, the unquestioning, highly structured and programmed delivery of the Critical Thinking module.

To return to the continuum between established and critical conceptions of management education sketched earlier, the Critical Thinking module is nearer the established approach . A broader, more radical kind of CME is at the other end where a dialogical and emergent, rather than pre-structured, approach is combined with challenging content. The Critical Thinking module and its textbook *Critical Thinking*, a narrow variant of CME: students are treated as atomised reasoners whose currently deficient cognitive processing and communicating of information can be improved by applying depth lessons from the textbook in a highly structured procedure. Confusingly enough, the espoused motivation and intended goals of the module are not so dissimilar to those of the more radical variant of CME. As *Critical Thinking* asserts, it has ‘never been more important to think critically about our *collective existence*, in all its fragility, inequality and interdependency’ (Chatfield, 2018: 332, emphasis added). Yet, its focus is exclusively upon improving the cognitive processing of the

individual so that s/he will become an ostensibly more rational manager or technocrat who pursues existing (unsustainable) ends more efficiently and effectively. Those ends are unquestioned by *Critical Thinking* as its limited purpose is to remove sources of bias from cognitive processing. Each individual's 'potential for brilliance and self-deception' is abstracted from its embeddedness in 'our collective existence' (Chatfield, 2018: 332). Each student is urged to adopt a 'more neutral perspective' (Chatfield, 2018: 12) that purportedly enables bias (e.g., 'unconscious', 'survivorship', 'confirmation', etc.) to be exposed and removed.

To question such 'Motherhood and Apple Pie' ideals and associated aspirations is tricky, if not foolhardy, in a society that is presumed to be rational, and seeks to augment that rationality by, for example, embracing the lessons of *Critical Thinking*. To doubt the unequivocal value of 'reasonableness and reliability' is to risk derision. Nonetheless, a broader and more radical conception of what is 'critical' extends scepticism to questioning the authority of the 'Motherhood' position. What are its presumptions and limits? Above all, there is little or no recognition of the historical and cultural conditions of its ostensibly self-assured knowledge claims. This omission is consistent with its particular focus upon the 'personal', conceived as students' imperfect reasoning; and its backgrounding of the 'political' that conditions the very possibility of identifying and remedying such imperfections. In *Critical Thinking*, the answer to the question of why, for example, 'we believe something to be the case' (Chatfield, 2018: 21) is (narrowly) framed in terms of individuals' cognitive processing, as if this is unconditioned by historical, political and cultural forces.

The module Critical Thinking aspires to improve cognitive processing by increasing the individual student's capacity to expose and remove bias, etc. It claims to enable individuals to avoid 'approaching something in *a one-sided way* that distorts your understanding' (Chatfield, 2018: 13, emphasis added). Scant attention is given to the social conditioning of 'critical thinking', including the prescriptions arising from the module that claim to escape 'one-sidedness'. From the perspective of CME, a significant, unacknowledged imperfection of Critical Thinking is its abstraction of the 'personal' (e.g., the application of critical thinking to remedy the deficient processing and communicating information) from the 'political' (e.g., the conditions that enable critical thinking but also constrain its scope and limit its capacity for self-reflection). It is highly unlikely, therefore, that the Critical Thinking module would, for example, prompt students to think critically about management practices, such as HRM. Or, more precisely, such criticism would be restricted to identifying and remedying sources of inefficiency and ineffectiveness in its operation by, for example, introducing a diversity programme. A CMS-informed conception of CME, in contrast, would invite and enable students to appreciate and reflect critically upon HRM, and so ask, for example, *who* exactly is employed in a South African University (Ruggunan, in this volume)

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Yet, despite these limitations, the notion of critical thinking presented in the Critical Thinking module can provide a useful, and perhaps necessary, point of departure for developing students' critical faculties by enabling them to resist taking knowledge claims at their 'face value' (Chatfield, 2018: 21). Potentially, such claims could include the entirely benign image of management routinely conveyed in mainstream textbooks. But as methods and prescriptions of *Critical Thinking* neither invite nor enable students to be critical of what the Critical Thinking module itself presents as 'given', their capacity to develop those critical faculties is limited. An example is the contentious claim that '*objectivity means trying to*

identify the facts of a situation as seen from the outside' (Chatfield, 2018: 21, emphasis added; see especially Chapter Five), as if there ever can be an 'outside'. This objectivist presupposition is epistemologically naïve and potentially dangerous. Faith in an 'outside' – that is, a God's eye view attributed to the product of Scientific Method (*Critical Thinking*, Chapter 5) – has the hazardous consequence of restricting the scope of critical thinking by confining it to the (technocratic) improvement of cognitive processing. It disallows critical thinking from considering whether the 'outside' is, on reflection, another 'inside' that, arguably, comprises an 'uncritical' self-assurance shielded by a lack of self-reflection.

A broader and more radical form of 'critical thinking' valorizes scepticism that extends to a critical appreciation of the historical, cultural and political formation of social phenomena, including the 'critical thinking' articulated in Chatfield's (2018) *Critical Thinking*. It asks: what are the (political) conditions' and (political) consequences of conceiving of critical thinking as it is in *Critical Thinking* (Chatfield, 2018)? In responding to this question, there can be no pretence of providing a definitive or authoritative, rather than contingent and provisional, answer as the broader conception of 'critical thinking' commended here incorporates on-going questioning of the adequacy of any response.

With regard to the relevance of Critical Thinking 'for business', if it had ever been credible to regard the cadre of 'management' as an impartial, technocratic broker between the forces of capital and labour, or between the state and the citizen, or to regard 'business' as an apolitical activity, those days are surely past. In this context, Chatfield's *Critical Thinking* leaves unchallenged the conditions (e.g., incentives, poor regulation) that nurture and normalize the thinking that it seeks to correct or purify. The intent to encourage students to 'think critically' is commendable. But without its own presumptions being subjected to criticism, and without

an equivalent or greater emphasis being placed upon the importance of changing the conditions that impede the capacity to think critically, Critical Thinking is destined to preserve the crisis-ridden status quo rather than subject it to critical scrutiny as a means of facilitating its emancipatory transformation.

SOME CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: CME TODAY

As another of the (white) ‘old gentlemen’, balding and white-haired, who haunt business schools and are occasionally invited to share their ‘ancient wisdom’ (Reynolds and Vince, p. XX, in this volume), I have reflected, in this chapter, upon my understanding of CME. and encounters with it. CME is now practiced in highly diverse settings, few of which are as benign as those of the UK in the 1970s. It is therefore more important than ever for CME practitioners to recognize and support each other as colleagues (Sliwa in this volume) and/or in virtual communities facilitated by media that were unimaginable only a few decades ago. The importance of community as a source of inspiration and support cannot be underestimated because, as Reynolds and Vince (in this volume) observe, when learning is conceived primarily as an individual activity, ‘the collective emotional dynamics that can, if acknowledged and understood, enhance leaning’ are obscured.

In contrast to the 1970s or 1980s, or indeed the 1990s and 2000s, CME now benefits from the body of knowledge that is known as Critical Management Studies (CMS) that can provide some legitimacy for the curriculum content and support of CME ideals. In the 2020s, a good case can also be made for CME (and CMS) in terms of their comparatively long engagement with emergent agendas, including the ‘grand challenges’ of global inequality and climate justice. CME can also draw support from the reports and recommendations of accreditation

bodies and other institutions when they underscore the importance of education that involves innovative and interactive modes of learning and/or promotes the introduction of topics and issues that are resonant with, or can be adapted by, CMS - such as ethics, diversity, inclusion, social responsibility, etc. (Sliwa, in this volume).

At the same time, the challenges involved in delivering CME are greater in settings that have become far more instrumental and commercial than in the 1970s; where class sizes are larger in comparison to earlier decades, and where there is a firmer notion of (orthodox, managerialist) content that “MUST be covered” (Kars-Unluoglu and Mangion-Thornley, p XX in this volume). Student-staff ratios have deteriorated markedly, resources are more stretched, and greater emphasis is placed on delivering ‘research outputs’, leaving less time for teaching preparation and student engagement. These developments have been compounded by the dislocations of Covid as well as the lengthier commutes of many staff, compared to the 1970s or even 1990s, making their availability to students more patchy and often more formalized. More recently, inflation and reduced applications from overseas students are impacting University budgets, at least in the UK. This stretching of resources is particularly challenging for CME when its content is not delivered didactically as a set of ‘factual’ content requiring absorption and regurgitation. CME is incompatible with a pedagogy reliant upon a structured and programmed set of exercises, even when undertaken in ostensibly self-directing small groups, as in the example of the Critical Thinking module introduced at Bayes Business School discussed above, as, in addition to the critical content provided by CMS, CME requires open dialogue and sufficient time to reflect critically on learning processes.

The delivery of CME can be highly rewarding but also challenging. My efforts to teach corporate governance to MBA students (Cass/Bayes) were an abject failure. Most of the class expected and wanted a didactic presentation of ‘the facts of the matter’ of corporate governance, narrowly conceived by them as board behaviour, that could be reliably applied when preparing coursework and answering examination questions. I was willing to provide some “chalk and talk” as a point of departure, but I then sought to engage the class in discussion of the political formation of corporate governance, rather than focus narrowly on directors and what they could or should do. The majority of class members were reluctant to take on the additional demand of engaging in ‘critical thinking’ required to explore the practicalities and systemic deficiencies that have repeatedly confounded conventional remedies for the improvement of corporate governance.

The preferences of my MBA students can, in part, be plausibly attributed to the cramming of MBA ‘education’ that leaves little time to think (Kars-Unluoglu and Mangion-Thornley, in this volume). As a consequence of a race-to-the-bottom propelled by market pressures, material that once was delivered in two years is now shoehorned into 12 months^{ix}. Had the MBA programme contained a foundation module like Critical Thinking discussed above, with all its limitations, it is possible that the MBA students would have been less perplexed and better disposed to my ‘critical’ and ‘dialogical’ approach to learning. Connections might perhaps have been made between the architecture of corporate governance, its detrimental effects, and its construction in a ‘one-sided way’ (Chatfield, 2018: 13). And connecting this ‘one-sidedness’ to the on-going political formation of corporate governance, rather than attributing it to the cognitive deficiencies of its architects or exponents, might have been more intelligible and credible.

Contemporary educational conditions of working in a ‘Busyness School’ have been characterized as “hurry and rush” ’ (Kars-Unluoglu and Mangion-Thornley, p XX in this volume) – for students as well as for staff. Ravikant (in this volume) reports that students were kept so busy that they were sleeping only 3-4 hours per night. Workload pressures on both staff and students make it difficult to find, or create, the time, space and energy necessary to enable, and engage in, sustained processes of critical reflection. Students may then manage this tension by treating CME as simply another ‘thing’ to be crammed, regurgitated in assessments, and then forgotten. Take, for example, the body of CMS research and scholarship that the theory and practice of leadership (Kars-Unluoglu and Mangion-Thornley, in this volume). By engaging such ideas, students may be prompted to question and reimagine conventional wisdoms, and potentially change processes of managing and organizing. But if there is insufficient time for teachers to prepare and explore those notions, students will, by default, continue to hear only about ‘the transformational leadership model for another two decades’ (Kars-Unluoglu and Mangion-Thornley, p XX in this volume). Students then miss out on how CME invites and facilitates processes of inner transformation fused with a concern for social justice (Bradbury, in this volume).

It is by addressing the multiple contradictions – social and ecological – that, from a critical perspective, permeate, and even define, the contemporary world of management and business that CME/CMS can potentially gain some leverage. CME is resonant with an intensifying sense of crisis, or crises (e.g., around the impacts of climate change and the destabilizing effects of social media and AI as well as mounting geopolitical tensions). That CME is positioned in business schools as an integral part of ‘the global architecture of management elites’ is problematic (Grey, p. XX, in this volume); but it also invites and enables students to question and contribute to changing that architecture. CME is responsive to a growing

premonition of ‘things falling apart’, and to the urgency of revitalising teaching methods and radically refreshing syllabi. CME/CMS is comparatively well prepared and equipped to address the increasingly pressing challenges, such as those of decarbonization and decolonizing the curriculum (Allen & Girei, in this volume). A key issue now is whether business schools will themselves be transformed in ways that increase their receptivity to CME. If CME is to flourish and contribute to an emancipatory transformation of work organizations, then its exponents must be fully involved in nurturing the institutional conditions that support and promote its emancipatory intent.

Appendix

Problem-Based Learning (Extract from ‘A Short Guide to Problem-Based Learning distributed to students).

Problem-based learning (PBL) is an active learning method. Instead of being told what you are supposed to know, memorizing this knowledge, and then applying it to a business problem, you will do it the other way around. You will start with the problem, figure out what you do and do not know, and then go and find the knowledge you need.

As a result, the success of PBL group meetings depends to a large extent on you and your fellow group members’ behaviour. Effective learning in small groups is clearly a team effort. Each student is not only responsible for his/her own learning, but also for the learning of fellow students. Effective learning can only take place when everyone actively participates, feels free to express their ideas, is enthusiastic and well prepared.

We advise you to use the knowledge of your fellow students and of your instructor to enhance your own learning.

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ⁱ In this volume, examples of the connection between the personal and the political include the consideration of Savarna Hindu dress code culture in private elite Indian business schools (Ravikant, in this volume) and how the Other comes to be known in learning communities (Hodgson, in this volume).

ⁱⁱ Our paths crossed again when I joined him and John Roberts, another ex-UMIST undergraduate and PhD student, at the Judge Institute of Management (Cambridge), now the Judge Business School. We were all involved in the delivery of courses, including an MBA module, that were designed to invite critical self-reflection on the interpersonal politics of ostensibly personal practices of managing.

ⁱⁱⁱ David Held, who was to become a leading Critical Theory scholar, was also a ‘Management Sciences’ graduate who was deeply influenced by the course which introduced him to the work of Habermas.

^{iv} That said, MBS was diverse. In addition to Stafford Beer, the cybernetician who masterminded the socialist experiment in Chile prior to the US-backed Pinochet coup, an influential industrial sociologist, Tom Lupton, was its Head (1977-84) and was the supervisor of Gibson Burrell, co-author the path-breaking *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis* (1979). MBS also employed maverick staff like Tony Berry who taught Management Control in a comparatively Socratic mode.

^v This course was inherited from Bob Fryer who followed his mentor, George Bain, from UMIST to Warwick.

^{vi} Gradgrind is the schoolboard superintendent in Dickens’ *Hard Times* whose didactic pedagogy is based upon the ‘banking’ of facts in the service of calculating, rational self-interest. See Freire (1970). In the contemporary Indian context, Gradgrindism is found in the

authoritarian and depoliticized ‘Brahminization of space, systems and syllabus’ (Ravikant, page XX, in this volume).

^{vii} This approach was ‘structuralist’ in inspiration whereas ‘The Manchester School’, associated with David Knights, myself and co-authors, was post-structuralist, in the sense that it retained the concerns of political sociology and political economy but incorporated elements of psychoanalysis and cultural studies.

^{viii} PBL comprises seven sequential stages (Clarifying Concepts, Defining the Problem, etc.) that are claimed to mimic ‘how our minds naturally work’ (A Short Guide to Problem Based Learning distributed to students). The structure is given, and so is “off limits” to critical thinking.

^{ix} When at Aston Business School in the 1980s, I taught full-time and part-time MBA classes that ran over the equivalent of two years. The classes lasted 3 hours which allowed for at least one break as well as time for more interaction and discussion, in comparison to the 2 hour sessions at Cass/Bayes.