

**University of Wales Trinity Saint David**

**Doctor of Business Administration (DBA)**

**Module:** Visions for the Future - Theoretical Perspectives on Management

**Module Code:** LCDB7008\_LON

**Assessment:** Management Assignment - Topic 1

**Title:** A Critical Evaluation of Management Theory and Contemporary Practice

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**Word Count:** 8209 words (including Executive Summary)

## Executive Summary

This report critically examines the assertion that management has remained largely unchanged and rooted in nineteenth-century theories despite extensive technological, social and economic change. The assertion identifies an important continuity but is too broad as a general judgement. Hierarchy, standardisation, performance measurement and formal accountability remain embedded in organisational systems because they continue to address problems of scale, reliability, traceability and legal responsibility. Digital technologies can reinforce these features by making work continuously visible and measurable. However, management theory has expanded far beyond industrial-era assumptions. Behavioural, systems, learning, capability, inclusion and stakeholder perspectives have broadened how managers understand employees, organisational effectiveness and managerial responsibility.

The report differentiates the changes in management theory and in organisational practice. The classical management theories focused on hierarchy and control, but since then management thinking has developed considerably. Contemporary management theories highlight the importance of agility, employee voice, psychological safety and sustainability. In practice, organisational change is incompatible with theoretical development because many organisations continue to depend on centralised budgets, formal approval and performance measures for important decisions.

Contemporary management practices such as AI, algorithmic management and hybrid working provide employees greater flexibility, but at the same time these practices allow managers to monitor performance in much more detail through management dashboards. Not only technological developments but also sustainability show a similar pattern because **while** organisations set new targets and collect extensive ESG information, they overlook these criteria in investment decisions or resource allocation. Overall, the analysis suggests that management theory has changed more significantly than organisational systems such as budgeting and performance management.

## Table of Contents

|                                                                                   |           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b><i>Executive Summary</i></b> .....                                             | <b>2</b>  |
| <b><i>1. Introduction</i></b> .....                                               | <b>4</b>  |
| <b><i>2. Background and Context</i></b> .....                                     | <b>5</b>  |
| 2.1 Industrial origins and the meaning of the assertion .....                     | 5         |
| 2.2 The contemporary organisational environment.....                              | 5         |
| 2.3 Key concepts and analytical distinctions .....                                | 6         |
| <b><i>3. Literature Review</i></b> .....                                          | <b>7</b>  |
| 3.1 Classical management and durable systems of control .....                     | 7         |
| 3.2 Human relations, motivation and normative control.....                        | 8         |
| 3.3 Systems, contingency and managerial work .....                                | 8         |
| 3.4 Knowledge, organisational learning and dynamic capabilities.....              | 9         |
| 3.5 Complexity, agility, change and leadership .....                              | 10        |
| 3.6 Psychological safety, inclusion, voice and responsible management.....        | 11        |
| 3.7 Critical synthesis and literature gaps .....                                  | 12        |
| <b><i>4. Critical Analysis and Discussion</i></b> .....                           | <b>13</b> |
| 4.1 Digital transformation, artificial intelligence and algorithmic control ..... | 14        |
| 4.2 Hybrid work and the redesign of coordination .....                            | 15        |
| 4.3 Resilience, crisis and the governance of uncertainty .....                    | 16        |
| 4.4 Inclusion, voice and ethical governance in practice.....                      | 17        |
| 4.5 Sustainability and ESG: broader purpose or extended bureaucracy?.....         | 18        |
| 4.6 Why classical management persists .....                                       | 18        |
| 4.7 A four-level judgement on continuity and change .....                         | 19        |
| <b><i>5. Managerial Implications and Application to Practice</i></b> .....        | <b>20</b> |
| 5.1 Diagnose the problem before selecting a theory .....                          | 20        |
| 5.2 Align authority, resources and accountability .....                           | 21        |
| 5.3 Govern technology and hybrid work through human-centred design .....          | 21        |
| 5.4 Convert Voice, Inclusion and Sustainability into Consequential Governance ... | 22        |
| 5.5 Evaluate Implementation as a Learning Process.....                            | 22        |
| <b><i>6. Conclusion and Recommendations</i></b> .....                             | <b>23</b> |
| <b><i>Reference List</i></b> .....                                                | <b>25</b> |

## **1. Introduction**

The assertion that management remains rooted in nineteenth-century theories is deliberately provocative. It draws attention to a visible contradiction: organisations use artificial intelligence, digital platforms, globally distributed teams and sophisticated sustainability reporting, yet many still organise authority through hierarchy, budgets, targets, job descriptions and formal approval. These mechanisms make continuity visible, but a binary judgement of management as either changed or unchanged is analytically weak. Management includes theoretical explanations of organising, managerial values, everyday practices, technologies of coordination and the formal systems through which decisions and resources are allocated.

The aim of this report is to critically examine the development of management theory and evaluate the contribution of contemporary theorists to current management challenges. It asks three connected questions. First, which assumptions from classical management remain influential? Second, what substantive advances have later theories made in explaining motivation, context, knowledge, adaptation, participation and responsibility? Third, under what conditions do contemporary ideas alter organisational practice rather than merely change managerial vocabulary? The discussion is based principally on peer-reviewed journal articles, including systematic reviews, meta-analyses and empirical studies, alongside a limited number of seminal books needed to represent foundational theories accurately.

The central argument is that management theory has changed considerably, although these changes are not always reflected in organisational practice or structure. Classical theories remain relevant because organisations still need coordination, accountability and clear ways of managing work at scale. Their continued use does not necessarily mean that management thinking has failed to develop. Problems arise when classical approaches are applied too widely, particularly in knowledge-intensive or innovative settings where employees need greater judgement and flexibility. Contemporary theories offer different ways of responding to these challenges, but their practical effect can remain limited if organisations adopt new management language without changing budgets, incentives, decision-making authority or governance.

The report adopts a conditional and problem-centred approach rather than treating newer theories as inherently superior. It first establishes the industrial and contemporary context, then critically synthesises the literature from classical management to learning, agility, employee voice and responsible management. The critical analysis tests competing theories against artificial intelligence, hybrid work, resilience, inclusion and ESG governance. The final sections explain the persistence of classical control, translate the analysis into managerial recommendations and provide a direct judgement on the assignment assertion. Evidence is evaluated comparatively, with particular attention to methodological limits and differences between individual, team and organisational outcomes.

The practical effect of management ideas depends heavily on context. Standardisation can be useful where consistency is important, but in some professional settings it may leave too little room for judgement. Digital monitoring gives managers more information about performance, although this does not automatically create trust. Sustainability provides another example. Organisations can increase ESG reporting without making substantial changes to the way major investment decisions are made. The report therefore examines management theories in terms of the problems they address, the evidence behind them, and their practical limitations. This helps to assess how far management has changed.

## **2. Background and Context**

### **2.1 Industrial origins and the meaning of the assertion**

Modern management theory developed partly in response to the coordination problems created by large-scale industrialisation. Factories, railways, mines and administrative enterprises brought together greater numbers of specialised workers, technologies and capital than could be governed through personal familiarity or informal supervision. Taylor's scientific management separated planning from execution and treated tasks as objects that could be analysed, standardised and measured (Taylor, 1911). Fayol examined management across the organisation and discussed functions such as planning, coordination, and authority (Fayol, 1949). Weber approached the issue differently. His model of bureaucracy was based on formal positions, rules, competence and written records, rather than personal relationships or tradition (Weber, 1947). The assessment describes these as 'nineteenth-century theories', but this wording is slightly misleading. The main issue is not simply when the theories were developed, but the industrial view of management behind them, particularly the reliance on hierarchy, specialisation and managerial control.

The historical context matters because classical theories were not irrational responses to their environment. They made large-scale cooperation more predictable and auditable. Yet they also assumed that organisational goals could be specified with reasonable clarity, that planning knowledge could be concentrated in management and that performance could be improved through decomposition and measurement. These assumptions remain influential wherever work is represented through targets, procedures and reporting lines. The question is therefore not whether classical principles still exist, but whether their underlying assumptions remain appropriate across contemporary organisational settings.

### **2.2 The contemporary organisational environment**

The twenty-first-century environment differs from the industrial setting in the speed of information, the importance of knowledge work, the permeability of organisational boundaries and the scale of stakeholder scrutiny. Drawing on Vial (2019), Hanelt et al. (2021) and Verhoef

et al. (2021), digital transformation can be understood as a change in business models, customer relationships, data flows and organisational capabilities rather than merely the automation of existing tasks. Raisch and Krakowski (2021) further identify an automation-augmentation paradox in which artificial intelligence can substitute for some forms of human judgement while complementing others. Hybrid work separates coordination from physical co-presence, while climate risk and ESG expectations extend managerial attention across supply chains, social impacts and longer time horizons.

Reliability and accountability remain important in contemporary organisations. The question is how much formal control is needed in different types of work. Digital technologies can improve access to information, but they also increase the capacity for employee monitoring. Cross-functional teams may give employees more flexibility in day-to-day work, although major decisions and expenditure can still depend on annual budgets and senior approval. Sustainability can show the same gap between new ideas and existing practice, particularly when reporting expands while investment decisions remain largely unchanged. Contemporary management is therefore characterised by simultaneous change and continuity rather than a linear replacement of one paradigm by another.

### **2.3 Key concepts and analytical distinctions**

Management theory is understood here as a set of explanations and normative propositions concerning how work, authority, knowledge, resources and responsibility should be organised. Management practice refers to the routines, decisions, technologies and relationships through which organising occurs. Four dimensions of change guide the analysis. Conceptual change concerns assumptions about employees, organisations and managerial purpose. Normative change concerns what managers are expected to value, including well-being, inclusion, sustainability and legitimacy. Practical change concerns work arrangements and managerial behaviour. Structural change concerns durable systems that distribute decision rights, information, resources and accountability.

These dimensions can move at different speeds. An organisation may adopt contemporary language and practices while leaving the structural distribution of authority largely unchanged. Conversely, formal hierarchy may support professional autonomy when rules are designed to enable rather than coerce work. The distinction also separates substantive from rhetorical change. Substantive change alters decisions, resources or consequences; rhetorical change adopts modern terminology without modifying the systems that govern behaviour. This framework provides a basis for judging whether management has genuinely evolved and avoids treating the appearance of a new technique as evidence of organisational transformation.

The framework also recognises that management knowledge is plural rather than governed by one philosophical position. Functionalist perspectives emphasise performance and design; interpretive perspectives examine meaning and social interaction; and critical perspectives question how authority and organisational interests are legitimised (Gioia and Pitre, 1990; Alvesson and Willmott, 1992). These positions need not be collapsed into a single theory. They can be used to test different aspects of the same practice. For example, an algorithm may improve measured efficiency, change how employees interpret their roles and reinforce unequal control simultaneously. These different outcomes need to be considered together when assessing how far management has changed. Efficiency alone is not enough to show that a practice is better. Higher output, for example, may come at the cost of employee autonomy or may transfer more risk to employees. At the same time, some forms of control can still be necessary, particularly where mistakes have serious consequences. Any evaluation therefore needs to recognise the choices and trade-offs involved, rather than assuming that organisational design is neutral.

### **3. Literature Review**

#### **3.1 Classical management and durable systems of control**

Classical management did not develop around one single problem. Taylor was interested in how work itself was carried out, whereas Fayol looked at planning and coordination across the organisation. Weber approached management from the question of bureaucracy and formal authority (Taylor, 1911; Fayol, 1949; Weber, 1947). What they have in common is a preference for order, clearly defined responsibility and some degree of managerial control.

There are good reasons why parts of this approach have survived. Formal procedures can still be useful, especially where mistakes are costly and responsibility needs to be clear. Hierarchy may help in these situations, but rules can also become restrictive when employees need to use their own judgement. Adler and Borys (1996) describe this difference as enabling and coercive formalisation. This distinction shows why the relevant question is not whether formal systems exist, but whether they support competent action or substitute control for judgement. The weakness of classical management becomes easier to see in work that is less predictable. A fixed procedure may work well for a routine task but much less well when employees have to interpret information or respond to an unfamiliar situation. Yet classical ideas have not disappeared. Budgets, targets and variance analysis still contain Taylorist and Fayolian features (Parker and Lewis, 1995). Hales (2002) also found bureaucratic features in organisations that were described as post-bureaucratic.

For this report, that continuity is more important than simply deciding whether classical management is old or modern. Management thinking has moved towards knowledge,

participation and learning, but organisational systems have not always moved at the same speed. Budgets and formal approval remain common. Their continued use can be reasonable where consistency and accountability matter, but less so where employees need greater judgement and flexibility.

### **3.2 Human relations, motivation and normative control**

Human relations and behavioural theories challenged the view of employees as merely economic actors. Mayo (1933), Maslow (1943) and McGregor (1960) redirected attention towards informal groups, needs, motivation and managerial assumptions. McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y are particularly significant because they connect managerial beliefs to organisational design: expectations of avoidance and irresponsibility can justify restrictive controls, whereas assumptions of self-direction support discretion and participation.

Later motivation research provides a stronger empirical and conceptual foundation. Gagné and Deci (2005), for example, distinguish autonomous from controlled motivation and argue that autonomy, competence and relatedness influence the quality of effort. This development weakens the assumption that close supervision and external rewards are sufficient, especially in knowledge-intensive work. Yet behavioural approaches are not automatically emancipatory. Barley and Kunda (1992) show that rational and normative ideologies of control can alternate. From a more critical perspective, Alvesson and Willmott (1992) warn that apparently humanistic practices may encourage employees to internalise organisational identities and objectives.

The behavioural tradition therefore changed management theory by showing that relationships, meaning and managerial expectations affect performance. Its limitation is that motivation does not necessarily redistribute authority. Participation may improve morale while strategic decisions, budgets and appointments remain centralised. Behavioural theory explains important mechanisms of engagement but is less complete as an account of organisational power.

### **3.3 Systems, contingency and managerial work**

Systems and contingency perspectives rejected the search for one universally superior design. Organisational effectiveness was increasingly understood as an outcome of interdependence among technology, environment, structure and human behaviour. Contingency theory proposes that performance depends on fit rather than adherence to a single model. According to Drazin and Van de Ven (1985), alternative conceptions of fit show that the relationship between context and structure is more complex than a simple prescription for either hierarchy or flexibility.

This perspective is an important advance because it converts management theory from a universal formula into a conditional judgement. Routine, tightly coupled and safety-sensitive

work may benefit from standardisation, whereas uncertain and knowledge-intensive work may require decentralised communication and professional discretion. However, contingency theory often assumes that managers can accurately diagnose relevant conditions and redesign the organisation accordingly. Context is interpreted through managerial frames and interests, causal factors may be unclear, and environments can change before a new fit is achieved.

Research on managerial work further challenged idealised classical accounts. Mintzberg's (1971) observational analysis portrays managerial activity as fragmented, interpersonal and reactive rather than as a neat sequence of planning, organising and controlling. In contrast, Carroll and Gillen (1987) found that classical functions still provide a useful account of managerial purposes. The two perspectives are therefore complementary: Fayolian categories identify intended functions, while empirical studies show how managerial work is actually performed. Gioia and Pitre (1990) reinforce the value of theoretical pluralism by arguing that different paradigms illuminate different dimensions of organisational life.

### **3.4 Knowledge, organisational learning and dynamic capabilities**

Knowledge-based perspectives changed the assumed location of organisational intelligence. Drucker (1999) argued that knowledge workers possess expertise that managers may not hold, making productivity more dependent on purpose, autonomy and learning than on direct supervision. Building on the importance of distributed knowledge, Nonaka (1994) conceptualises knowledge creation as interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge. Crossan et al. (1999) further describe learning as a multilevel process through which individual intuition is interpreted, integrated and institutionalised, while Argote and Miron-Spektor (2011) show that experience becomes organisational knowledge only through processes of creation, retention and transfer.

The learning perspective contains an internal tension. Institutionalising knowledge creates memory and reliability, but routines can later inhibit renewal. Performance targets, time pressure and fear of failure can restrict reflection and knowledge sharing. Status and power also influence whose knowledge is recognised. Knowledge management can therefore become extractive when employees are expected to disclose expertise without gaining influence over its use.

Dynamic capabilities theory addresses how organisations renew competences when established routines become inadequate. Teece et al. (1997) describe dynamic capabilities as the organisational ability to renew and recombine internal and external competences as environments change. Building on this foundation, Teece (2007) develops the microfoundations of sensing opportunities and threats, seizing them and transforming the asset base. This framework explains why operational efficiency alone cannot secure long-term

success: an organisation may optimise existing activities while overlooking technological, regulatory or market change.

The theory remains difficult to operationalise. Peteraf et al. (2013) identify divergent conversations within the field, and Schilke et al. (2018) find continuing variation in definitions, levels and measures. Zhang et al. (2023) similarly show that the literature draws on routines, entrepreneurship and improvisation without a single settled mechanism. Taken together, these studies indicate continuing conceptual and operational ambiguity within the dynamic-capabilities literature. The risk is circular reasoning when successful adaptation is treated as proof that a capability existed. Stronger research must identify observable processes before outcomes are known and analyse failed as well as successful reconfiguration.

### **3.5 Complexity, agility, change and leadership**

Complexity leadership theory rejects the assumption that organisational intelligence resides solely with senior management. Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) distinguish administrative, adaptive and enabling leadership, with enabling leadership linking formal coordination to emergent interaction. Extending this argument, Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018) emphasise leadership for adaptability, arguing that organisations need structures that permit useful novelty to emerge without abandoning operational discipline. The contribution is a more realistic account of innovation as an interaction between formal authority and distributed expertise.

Organisational agility offers a related but unsettled vocabulary. Walter (2021) identifies persistent definitional ambiguity. More recent systematic reviews provide broader evidence: Nguyen et al. (2025) report a generally positive relationship between forms of agility and organisational outcomes across 249 empirical studies, while Asghar et al. (2026) conceptualise agility as multidimensional rather than a single capability. Taken together, these reviews strengthen the case for agility but also show that its meaning, measurement and effects depend on sector, level of analysis and implementation.

A related literature frames adaptation as a continuing tension rather than a one-off change. March (1991) distinguishes exploration of new possibilities from exploitation of established capabilities, while O'Reilly and Tushman (2013) explain how organisational ambidexterity seeks to sustain both. Smith and Lewis (2011) argue that such competing demands are paradoxical and require ongoing balancing rather than final resolution. This reinforces the report's conditional position: organisations need differentiated controls for experimentation and reliable delivery rather than one system for both.

The central boundary condition is authority. Iterative work, customer feedback and self-organising teams have limited value when teams cannot change priorities or access resources. Agility can therefore become ceremonial, consisting of meetings and terminology inside unchanged approval systems. Change scholarship makes a similar point. Stouten et al.

(2018) find that evidence-based change is more iterative and context-sensitive than linear prescriptions imply. Leader-centred theories also require caution: van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) identify conceptual and measurement problems in transformational leadership research, while Eva et al. (2019) show that servant leadership is promising but heterogeneous. Leadership behaviour matters, but it cannot compensate indefinitely for misaligned incentives, workload, governance and structural power.

### **3.6 Psychological safety, inclusion, voice and responsible management**

Psychological safety moves away from the idea that effective management depends mainly on authority and control. Edmondson (1999) conceptualises it as a team-level climate in which interpersonal risk-taking is perceived as safe. Building on this foundational work, reviews by Edmondson and Lei (2014) and Edmondson and Bransby (2023), together with the meta-analysis by Frazier et al. (2017), indicate that psychological safety supports learning, information sharing and performance under appropriate conditions. It does not imply low standards; it allows employees to ask questions, disclose uncertainty and report mistakes without disproportionate interpersonal cost.

Employee voice adds another dimension because having an opportunity to speak does not necessarily mean that employees have influence. Morrison (2023) links voice to whether employees feel safe, believe speaking up will make a difference and expect managers to respond. Inclusion raises a related question about whose views are recognised. Shore et al. (2011) distinguish between belonging and the recognition of individual uniqueness. Later reviews suggest that simply increasing representation does not automatically create an inclusive workplace (Shore et al., 2018; Roberson, 2019). Nishii (2013) similarly finds that the climate within a group affects how diversity is experienced and whether it contributes positively to group processes. An organisation can therefore have the same formal procedures for everyone while differences in status still affect who is heard and whose knowledge influences decisions.

Responsible management takes the discussion beyond employees and internal organisational performance. Freeman (1984) places affected groups within strategic analysis, while Donaldson and Preston (1995) clarify descriptive, instrumental and normative dimensions of stakeholder theory. Jones et al. (2018) argue that stakeholder relationships can contribute to sustainable competitive advantage. Sustainability also brings a longer-term perspective to managerial responsibility. Elkington's (1997) triple-bottom-line approach considers economic, social and environmental performance, while Bansal and DesJardine (2014) draw attention to the importance of time in sustainability decisions. Hahn et al. (2015) further show that organisations often have to deal with tensions between competing sustainability objectives rather than simply finding a single solution.

These approaches also have limitations. Stakeholder theory becomes difficult to apply when different groups want different things. ESG creates another problem because there is still no single agreed way to measure performance. Studies show differences in ESG research, ratings and weighting methods (Gillan et al., 2021; Berg et al., 2022; Christensen et al., 2022). This makes managerial judgement important, especially when stakeholder interests conflict with financial priorities.

### **3.7 Critical synthesis and literature gaps**

Management theory has changed over time, but older ideas have not simply disappeared. Behavioural approaches drew attention to motivation, and contingency thinking showed that the same management approach may not suit every organisation. Later research gave more attention to learning, adaptation and employee knowledge. Inclusion and stakeholder perspectives also changed the discussion by asking whose views and interests should matter. These ideas still have practical limits. Autonomy is difficult without real decision-making authority, for example, and agility is limited when budgets and resources remain tightly controlled. Stakeholder interests can also be difficult to balance.

The literature says much more about whether contemporary management practices are adopted than about what changes after they are introduced. Studies often report attitudes or outcomes, but changes in authority, budgets and resource allocation receive less attention. Failed implementation is also harder to see, since successful cases are more likely to be reported. This makes it difficult to judge how far newer management ideas actually change organisational practice. Section 4 takes this issue further by examining whether changes in management thinking are matched by changes in decision-making, control and accountability. The evidence base is also uneven across theories. Established constructs such as psychological safety have accumulated meta-analytic and review evidence, whereas concepts such as agility, dynamic capability and responsible management are defined and measured less consistently. Reviews can map convergence and disagreement, but they do not remove dependence on the quality of underlying studies. Cross-sectional designs may show that a contemporary practice is associated with performance without establishing direction of causality; retrospective case studies can make successful adaptation appear more coherent than it was; and organisation-level findings may conceal unequal effects across groups. Claims of theoretical progress should therefore be separated from claims of reliable implementation.

A further gap concerns power and translation. Many perspectives recommend learning, participation or adaptation but provide limited guidance on how these principles enter budgeting, promotion, risk governance and capital allocation. Theories can be accepted symbolically while their assumptions are contradicted by existing systems. A team may be

described as empowered while lacking spending authority, or employees may be invited to speak while career consequences reward silence. The literature consequently supports a conditional synthesis: contemporary theories expand the questions management can ask, but organisational change depends on whether formal and informal institutions permit different answers to shape action. A temporal gap is equally significant. Concepts and policies can be adopted quickly, whereas career structures, accounting systems and regulatory obligations change slowly. Research that captures only the launch of an initiative may therefore overstate transformation. Longer observation is needed to determine whether a practice survives leadership turnover, budget pressure and conflicting performance demands, and whether it alters the durable infrastructure of control.

Table 1 synthesises the main streams of theory, the contemporary challenges they can be assessed against and the conditional judgements based on the literature.

**Table 1. Conditional synthesis of management perspectives**

| Perspective                    | Primary problem                           | Contemporary relevance                         | Conditional judgement                                             |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Classical management           | Scale, reliability and coordination       | Hierarchy, rules and measurement               | Retain where traceability is material; limit coercive application |
| Behavioural perspectives       | Motivation, relationships and assumptions | Autonomy, engagement and normative control     | Participation is incomplete without authority and resources       |
| Systems and contingency        | Interdependence and contextual fit        | Varied technologies and uncertain environments | Diagnose context; avoid retrospective claims of fit               |
| Learning and capabilities      | Knowledge creation and renewal            | Distributed expertise and reconfiguration      | Measure processes and include failed adaptation                   |
| Complexity and agility         | Emergence and rapid response              | Iteration, interaction and team learning       | Give teams bounded decision rights and resource flexibility       |
| Safety, inclusion and voice    | Interpersonal risk and participation      | Ethical challenge and diverse knowledge        | Assess influence and protection, not channels alone               |
| Stakeholder and sustainability | Plural interests and long-term effects    | ESG, legitimacy and societal impact            | Connect metrics to governance and capital allocation              |

*Source: Author's synthesis of the literature reviewed in Sections 3.1-3.7.*

#### 4. Critical Analysis and Discussion

The assignment assertion can be tested most effectively against contemporary problems for which classical theory provides only a partial explanation. The following analysis integrates competing perspectives rather than repeating the literature review. For each issue, the

relevant question is whether contemporary theory changes the distribution of knowledge, discretion and responsibility, or whether new practices are absorbed into established systems of measurement and control. The analysis also distinguishes evidence of adoption from evidence of changed organisational outcomes.

#### **4.1 Digital transformation, artificial intelligence and algorithmic control**

Digital transformation provides the strongest evidence both for and against the assertion. It demonstrates profound change in products, business models, information flows and coordination, but it also reveals how new technologies can reproduce classical assumptions in more intensive forms. According to Vial (2019), digital transformation is a process through which digital technologies trigger strategic responses and structural change rather than the simple introduction of software. Consistent with this broader interpretation, Hanelt et al. (2021), reviewing 279 peer-reviewed articles, describe a movement towards malleable organisational designs and digital ecosystems. Verhoef et al. (2021) similarly distinguish digitisation, digitalisation and organisational transformation, emphasising that transformation requires new capabilities, structures and performance measures.

These accounts contradict the claim that management has remained wholly unchanged. Digital firms coordinate across organisational boundaries, use real-time data and reconfigure products continuously. Expertise can be decentralised because employees gain immediate access to information that was previously concentrated in management. Digital tools can support collaboration, rapid experimentation and customer feedback. In this sense, technology creates conditions favourable to contemporary theories of learning and adaptation.

Yet technology is not intrinsically decentralising. Raisch and Krakowski (2021) describe this tension as an automation-augmentation paradox: artificial intelligence may replace human judgement in some activities while enhancing it in others. The two processes are interdependent, and excessive reliance on either can create negative outcomes. A managerial decision to automate is therefore also a decision about authority, expertise and accountability. The key issue is not whether AI is technically advanced, but how work and decision rights are designed around it.

Algorithmic management can reproduce scientific management with unprecedented reach. Kellogg et al. (2020) describe algorithms as a contested terrain of control because they enable employers to direct, evaluate and discipline work while workers develop counter-practices. Consistent with this power-centred interpretation, Curchod et al. (2020) show how platform evaluations generate power asymmetries and constrain agency. Möhlmann et al. (2021) further explain that algorithmic management combines matching and control in online labour platforms. These systems may appear decentralised because workers choose when to log on,

yet prices, task allocation, rankings and access to future work can be controlled centrally and opaquely.

This is not a minor continuation of classical management. Digital monitoring differs from the visible supervisor because it can operate continuously, aggregate vast data and influence behaviour through ratings or automated prompts. Nevertheless, the underlying logic—measurement, standardisation and separation of design from execution—remains recognisably classical. Technology changes the instrument of control more quickly than it changes the philosophy of control.

Work-design research provides a more constructive alternative to technological determinism. Parker and Grote (2022) argue that digital technologies can improve or damage autonomy, skill use, feedback, social connection and workload depending on design choices. Human-centred implementation requires joint attention to technical capability and the quality of work. Upskilling employees is insufficient if the technology removes discretion, creates unmanageable monitoring or makes accountability unclear.

The governance problem is especially significant where AI informs consequential decisions. Organisations need explicit boundaries between automated recommendations, human approval and fully human judgement. Reviewers require sufficient expertise, time and authority to challenge system outputs. Accountability cannot be assigned vaguely to "the algorithm" when choices about data, objectives, thresholds and deployment were made by organisational actors. AI represents substantive managerial development only when it changes how expertise is combined, makes decisions more contestable and clarifies responsibility. Otherwise, it becomes a technologically sophisticated extension of existing control.

## **4.2 Hybrid work and the redesign of coordination**

Hybrid work challenges classical assumptions that presence, supervision and productivity are closely connected. The rapid expansion of home working has made this a durable management issue rather than a temporary pandemic adjustment. Barrero et al. (2023) document the sustained growth of working from home, arguing that managerial practices and supporting technologies continue to adapt. The implication is that organisations cannot simply restore pre-digital practices without considering employee expectations, labour markets and task design.

Evidence does not support a universal judgement for or against remote work. Wang et al. (2021) identify autonomy and social support as resources, but also find challenges involving communication, loneliness, workload and work-home interference. At the organisational-network level, Yang et al. (2022), analysing collaboration data from more than 61,000 information workers, found that firm-wide remote work made collaboration networks more static and siloed. By contrast, Bloom et al. (2024), in a randomised trial involving 1,612

employees, found that a hybrid schedule improved satisfaction and reduced attrition by one-third without damaging measured performance or promotion outcomes.

These findings are not necessarily contradictory. They examine different outcomes, work patterns and levels of analysis. Hybrid work can improve individual retention while creating coordination problems for teams. It may benefit employees with long commutes but disadvantage those without adequate space. It can increase autonomy while reducing informal access to influential colleagues. The managerial lesson is contingency rather than ideology: work arrangements should be designed around task interdependence, knowledge flows, employee circumstances and the outcomes the organisation is trying to achieve.

Hybrid work also exposes the persistence of classical control. When managers cannot observe physical presence, some organisations substitute digital surveillance, activity tracking or excessive meetings. This can make work more visible, but it may also reduce trust and encourage employees to focus on appearing productive. A more flexible approach focuses on results, supports collaboration, and gives teams freedom to make decisions within clear limits. Such a design still requires accountability, but accountability shifts from continuous observation towards agreed results and transparent coordination.

Equity is another important challenge. Uniform policies can produce unequal experiences because employees differ in workspace, caring responsibilities, disability, commuting costs and access to networks. Managers must therefore monitor career progression, development and visibility rather than assuming that a formally equal policy is inclusive. Hybrid work shows a real change in management practice, but it works best when organisations also change how they coordinate work and assess performance, rather than simply using digital tools to maintain office-based control.

#### **4.3 Resilience, crisis and the governance of uncertainty**

Twenty-first-century organisations face disruptions that are difficult to predict and cannot be managed solely through optimisation. Organisational resilience has consequently become an important management construct. Ducheck (2020) conceptualises resilience as a capability involving anticipation, coping and adaptation. Hillmann and Guenther (2021) show that organisational resilience has attracted much more attention, although there is still little agreement about exactly what it includes or how it should be measured. This makes the concept difficult to use consistently. Resilience is clearly relevant when organisations face disruption, but simply describing a business as resilient says very little unless there is evidence of how it responded and what the outcome was.

Classical management is not irrelevant here. In a crisis, clear responsibilities, reliable information and emergency procedures can be extremely useful. The problem comes when control is too centralised. People closer to the situation may recognise a problem first, yet still

have to wait for approval before acting. Some structure is necessary, but employees also need enough authority to respond when events develop differently from what was expected.

There is another question that is sometimes overlooked: who is expected to absorb the disruption? Employees may work longer hours or deal with greater insecurity so that the organisation can continue operating. Suppliers can face the same problem if risk is passed down the supply chain. Calling this resilience can hide the cost of maintaining business continuity. Survival alone is not enough to show that an organisation has managed a crisis well.

Climate change makes this more difficult because not all risks can be managed through normal forecasting. Organisations have to deal with long-term transition pressures as well as more immediate physical risks. Scenario thinking, longer time horizons and coordination beyond organisational boundaries become more important in these conditions (George et al., 2016). Yet many organisations still make decisions through annual budgets and short-term performance targets. This can make long-term climate commitments difficult to translate into everyday decisions.

#### **4.4 Inclusion, voice and ethical governance in practice**

Contemporary organisations face stronger expectations concerning fairness, dignity and participation. These expectations represent real normative change. Classical management generally asks how to coordinate employees; contemporary inclusion and voice research asks whether employees can influence systems that affect them. This is especially important in professional, safety-sensitive and innovative settings where management depends on information held by employees.

The existence of formal voice channels does not establish meaningful participation. Employees consider both whether speaking is safe and whether it is likely to matter (Morrison, 2023). An organisation may collect employee survey data, operate an ethics hotline and encourage challenge while still rewarding conformity. Where promotion and performance systems penalise dissent indirectly, official voice mechanisms have limited credibility.

The distinction between procedural and substantive inclusion is therefore central. Procedural inclusion means that employees are invited, consulted or represented. Substantive inclusion means that their knowledge changes priorities, resource allocation or decisions. Nishii (2013) shows that organisational conditions influence whether diversity improves or damages group processes. Inclusion is not generated by demographic representation alone; it requires norms and systems that reduce status barriers and make difference usable.

Ethical governance also requires protection from retaliation and clear responsibility for responding to concerns. Psychological safety should not remove standards for evidence or conduct, but it should allow people to disclose uncertainty and mistakes. Managers need to

distinguish good-faith error from negligence and disagreement from disloyalty. This is a clear development beyond classical authority because it treats challenge as an organisational resource. However, it becomes effective only when governance connects voice to action.

#### **4.5 Sustainability and ESG: broader purpose or extended bureaucracy?**

The managerial responsibility is widened, and organisations are expected to understand sustainability, ESG, emissions, supply-chain impacts, data governance and community consequences. When management systems incorporate environmental and social indicators, it is difficult to explain these concepts through classical internal efficiency theory alone.

Sustainability can be managed through bureaucratic techniques such as policies, targets and reports, which are not ineffective. Measurement can play an important role in making previously overlooked impacts more visible and strengthening accountability. However, the problem arises when reporting is treated as an end in itself rather than as a basis for changing organisational decisions. For example, organisations may collect and report ESG data while investment decisions and executive incentives focus on short-term financial performance.

Responsible management does not rely on a single score because there are the differences between ESG ratings. Gillan et al. (2021) highlight the significant differences across ESG and CSR research and similarly, Berg et al. (2022) find that ESG ratings differ even for the same company and even individual factors affect the final assessment (Christensen et al., 2022). These findings show managers that when they use ESG information for decision-making, they should understand ESG rating measurements, transparency, as well as the existence of uncertainty. Responsible management affects investment decisions and resource allocation because environmental and social risks are considered in investment choices. Bansal and DesJardine (2014) draw attention to sustainability, and although there will be high costs in the present, the benefits become clearer in the longer term. So, organisations may be influenced by short-term investment performance, which can limit their sustainability commitments. Overall, sustainability has changed the reporting structures, and information managers are expected to consider it; therefore, the effect of sustainability on modern management practice is not consistent.

#### **4.6 Why classical management persists**

Classical management practices remain visible because many of the problems they were designed to address have not disappeared. The legal and financial risks show that organisations need clear responsibility and coordination procedures. Formalisation is therefore not necessarily evidence of outdated management. In some settings it remains useful; in others it can become unnecessarily restrictive. Path dependence offers one explanation for why established structures are difficult to change (Sydow et al., 2009). Management practices are connected to budgets, reporting systems, promotion processes

and formal authority. Changing one part does not automatically change the rest. An agile team may organise its own work but still depend on senior approval for expenditure. Employee voice may also be encouraged while career progression continues to reward compliance.

Adler and Borys's (1996) distinction between enabling and coercive formalisation is useful when rules help employees by clarifying responsibilities. They become more restrictive when compliance takes priority over professional judgement. The same procedure may therefore work well in a safety-critical process and poorly in work that requires experimentation. Another reason for persistence is that new management ideas can spread faster than organisational structures change. Abrahamson (1996) links this to management fashion and legitimacy. Organisations may adopt agile language, purpose statements or inclusion initiatives because these practices are associated with modern management. Budgets, targets and reporting relationships are usually harder to change. As a result, contemporary ideas may be fitted into existing systems rather than replacing them.

The adoption of a new management practice tells only part of the story. Case studies can show how change develops within an organisation, although their findings may not apply more widely. Surveys identify a relationship between variables, but this does not necessarily show causality. Stouten et al. (2018) question the gap between popular management prescriptions and evidence of what actually works. Evidence of changes in authority, access to resources or employee behaviour is therefore more useful when assessing whether an organisation has genuinely changed.

Overall, organisations do not change their management approach completely, and in most organisations, classic management controls and modern practices often operate together. This layered hybridity is effective when the different elements support each other. Adding contemporary practices does not mean that the organisation has been redesigned.

#### **4.7 A four-level judgement on continuity and change**

In order to assess the assertion, changes in management should be examined at four different levels: conceptual, normative, practical and structural. At the conceptual level, it is difficult to argue that management has remained unchanged because management thinking has moved its focus beyond the classical management focus on rational control to motivation, employee knowledge, stakeholder responsibility, psychological safety and sustainability. At the normative level, the expectations from managers have changed significantly. The expectations for efficiency and financial performance are still of the same importance, but managerial responsibility now includes employee well-being, environmental impact and the responsible use of organisational data. Beyond these concepts, the inclusion of employee voice and responsible management shows that the evaluation of managerial standards has widened. At the practical level, the change is less clear because hybrid working has changed the number

of employees working, and the independent judgement of employee has increased in some knowledge-intensive roles. Besides annual budgets, hierarchical approval, and individual performance targets, employees may have little influence over expenditure or strategic priorities, so these factors show that practical change has been selective. At the structural level, change is slow because senior levels make decisions about capital and accountability. Hierarchy can still be useful where clear responsibility and accountability are required. Slow change is clear in the organisational systems in determining who is responsible for decisions on budget control and resource allocation.

The four-level analysis highlights the reason for the contradictory findings in the literature, but this analysis also shows that the findings are not necessarily inconsistent; they refer to different parts of organisational life. The overall pattern is uneven, and continuity in authority and budgets is still strong, but change is evident in management ideas and expectations. Modern management approaches have expanded what managers are expected to consider, but they have not automatically changed the structures through which organisations exercise control.

## **5. Managerial Implications and Application to Practice**

### **5.1 Diagnose the problem before selecting a theory**

Managers should begin with the organisational problem rather than a preferred management fashion. Routine, tightly coupled and safety-sensitive work may require standardisation, traceability and formal review. Innovative or knowledge-intensive work requires greater discretion, feedback and tolerance for recoverable error. Work should therefore be classified by uncertainty, interdependence, reversibility and risk before a management approach is selected. This prevents organisations from applying one philosophy uniformly to activities with different demands.

The assumptions of a proposed practice should then be made explicit. Agile methods assume that teams can obtain feedback and alter priorities. Psychological safety assumes that leaders respond constructively to voice. Dynamic capabilities assume that resources can be reconfigured. Stakeholder management assumes that relevant interests enter decisions. When these conditions are absent, adoption is likely to be symbolic rather than operational.

A diagnostic matrix can make this comparison explicit. Managers can rate the task's uncertainty, time pressure, interdependence, reversibility and regulatory exposure, then compare those conditions with the assumptions of alternative theories. The exercise does not generate an automatic answer, but it makes trade-offs visible and creates a record of why a particular design was selected. It also helps identify where different parts of the same process

require different controls, such as strict standards for safety boundaries combined with discretion over problem-solving methods.

## **5.2 Align authority, resources and accountability**

Giving someone responsibility without giving them enough authority to act can create problems. This is still common in organisations. A team may be expected to improve a service or respond quickly to a customer problem, for example, but still need senior approval before it can spend money or change an established process. In such cases, responsibility has moved down the organisation, but decision-making has not. This can slow the response and make it difficult to see who is actually accountable. Not every decision should be decentralised. Senior approval remains sensible where mistakes would be costly or difficult to reverse. For routine or professional decisions, however, employees need some room to use their own judgement. The same applies to formal procedures. Procedures are useful when they clarify responsibilities or help different parts of the organisation work together. Problems start when following the procedure becomes more important than solving the problem. Managers therefore need to look at the result of a decision as well as whether the correct process was followed.

## **5.3 Govern technology and hybrid work through human-centred design**

Technology should support managerial judgement rather than replace it automatically. Before using an automated system for important decisions, organisations need to consider what the system is intended to do, what data it relies on and what may happen when it produces an incorrect result. Human review is also important, particularly where decisions affect employees or other stakeholders. Those responsible for reviewing automated outputs need enough knowledge, time and authority to question them rather than simply approve what the system recommends. Monitoring should also be transparent and proportionate to its purpose. The aim is to use technology to strengthen accountable human judgement, rather than treating automation as an end in itself (Raisch and Krakowski, 2021; Parker and Grote, 2022).

Hybrid working requires the same attention to organisational context. The appropriate arrangement will depend partly on the nature of the work, the level of collaboration required and employees' access to information. Performance should be assessed primarily through the quality and results of work rather than physical presence alone. Organisations also need to consider whether remote employees have the same opportunities to participate, develop their careers and build useful professional relationships. A single hybrid-working policy may appear fair, but it will not necessarily affect all employees in the same way.

#### **5.4 Convert Voice, Inclusion and Sustainability into Consequential Governance**

Employee voice and inclusion should be judged by whether they have any real influence on organisational decisions, rather than by participation numbers alone. It is important to consider whether employee concerns are taken seriously, whether people can disagree without negative consequences and whether different groups have fair access to information and career opportunities. Training may help improve inclusive behaviour, but it will have limited effect if problems in promotion, workload or access to decision-making remain unchanged.

Sustainability commitments also need to influence important organisational choices. This includes decisions about investment, procurement, executive incentives and risk. ESG dashboards can provide useful information, but they should not be treated as a complete measure of responsible performance. Managers need to consider how sustainability commitments affect actual decisions, particularly when environmental or social objectives conflict with financially attractive alternatives. This makes it easier to judge whether sustainability is embedded in organisational practice or mainly reflected in reporting.

#### **5.5 Evaluate Implementation as a Learning Process**

Organisations need to look beyond whether a new management practice has simply been introduced. The number of agile teams, training programmes or sustainability reports shows activity, but says much less about whether anything has actually improved. More useful evidence would include changes in decision quality, knowledge sharing, employee voice, avoidable errors, or environmental and social outcomes. A baseline is therefore important, together with regular review of both expected and unexpected results.

Where possible, new practices can first be tested on a limited scale. This gives managers an opportunity to see how they work in practice and to make changes before they become embedded across the organisation. Management capability is therefore not simply about knowing different theories or models. It also requires judgement: understanding when an approach may work, recognising its limitations and being prepared to change direction when the evidence does not support the original decision. This is particularly relevant in a DBA context because complex organisational problems rarely provide complete information or one clearly correct response.

Implementation also needs regular review. Managers should be clear about the problem being addressed, who has decision-making authority and what outcomes are expected. They should then consider whether the practice is producing those outcomes and whether it has created problems elsewhere in the organisation. This helps to move theory beyond a management label and allows its assumptions to be examined in practice.

The costs of change are not always shared equally. Greater employee autonomy, for example, may increase the coordination burden on middle managers. Resilience programmes may

place additional demands on employees, while new performance measures can encourage people to focus on targets rather than the underlying purpose of the work. Review should therefore consider not only whether an initiative appears successful, but also who has gained greater control, who has taken on additional risk and whether responsibility is matched by sufficient authority.

Managers should also be willing to revise or discontinue a practice when the evidence shows that it is not working as expected. Looking at more than one outcome is important because improvement at one level can create difficulties at another. Higher individual satisfaction, for instance, does not necessarily mean that team coordination has improved, and greater organisational efficiency may still impose disproportionate costs on employees or suppliers. Lessons from implementation should inform future decisions, but successful practices should not automatically become permanent rules. Organisational conditions change, so procedures also need to be reviewed over time. Otherwise, an approach introduced to increase flexibility may eventually create another form of rigidity.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Even though it is a valid statement for some modern work environments, claiming that the modern management is unchanged as it is still using some nineteenth-century paradigms is a very broad statement. The principles of classical theories still influence organisational structures because they use hierarchy, standardisation, and formal accountability to solve important coordination problems, but modern management is not simply an extension of the theories of Taylor, Weber or Fayol. The assumptions about knowledge, employee and corporate responsibility have developed beyond classical management theories, while digital technology has not removed traditional managerial control; in some organisations, the technology strengthened managerial control by monitoring employees more closely and centralising information for managerial decision-making.

Management theory has changed considerably since the classical period, with later approaches questioning some of its main assumptions. Behavioural theories challenged the view of employees mainly as economic actors, while systems and contingency perspectives showed that management also depends on organisational context and that no single approach works equally well in every setting. As managerial responsibilities become wider, new concepts such as employee voice, inclusion, stakeholder and sustainability are part of organisational performance. They all change management thinking and influence what organisations actually do.

A key distinction between management theories and management practices is the pace of change because theories have evolved more significantly than organisational practice, but this does not mean that contemporary approaches have displaced classical management theories.

Modern management theories highlight key aspects of classical management principles and their limitations, particularly in terms of employee autonomy, knowledge, and adaptation. The important dimension in organisational practice is whether these modern theories lead to changes in decision-making, resource allocation, or accountability. In practical terms, managers should adapt their approach according to the problem, and they should determine whether formal control is needed and the degree of flexibility and employee participation. All in all, what matters most is that managers should assess the level of change in management practice instead of focusing on modern terminology.

Future research should examine the degree of observable changes in contemporary management practices in decision-making, information flows and resource allocation. Research should use longitudinal and comparative studies with successful and failed cases and assess whether these changes reflect short-term management trends. In practical terms, organisations should not assume either classical or contemporary approaches as complete solutions. The most appropriate approach should depend on the organisation and type of risk, and not limit professional judgement and learning.

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