

Critical Management Studies

The CMS Lens

BMBM6003 Contemporary Issues in Management

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What does "good management" look like?

Go to vevox.app and enter the session code

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Part 1

Why Question Management?

Where We Left Off

The Anxiety Machine

AI hype is manufactured. The \$2 trillion narrative serves specific interests.

The Arms Race

The space race parallel showed us that big investments do not guarantee public benefit.

The Value of Thinking

University is not about knowledge delivery. It is about forming the capacity to think.

But think with what tools?

The Question Nobody Asks

Mainstream Management

"How do we do this better?"

Critical Management Studies

"Better for whom?"

Every management tool, technique, and theory was created by someone, for someone.

Watch

RSA Animate: Crises of Capitalism

David Harvey | 11 minutes

[youtube.com/watch?v=qOP2V_np2c0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOP2V_np2c0)

Harvey argues that the 2008 financial crisis was not a failure of the system.
It was the system working as designed.

RSA ANIMATE

ECONOMISTS AT

ES

ME





Discussion

What did Harvey challenge
that you previously took
for granted?

What Harvey Rejected

Four mainstream explanations for the 2008 crisis



Human Nature

人性贪婪论

"People are greedy. That caused the crisis."

Greed is a constant. It cannot explain why the crisis hit at a specific moment.



Institutional Failure

制度失败论

"Regulators failed to control the banks."

But why were regulators designed to look the other way?
Who benefited from deregulation?



False Theory

错误理论论

"Economists used the wrong models."

Blaming the model protects the system. You swap the formula and carry on.



Cultural Origin

文化根源论

"Anglo-Saxon culture encourages risk-taking."

Germany and Japan also collapsed. It was not one culture's problem.

Each explanation protects someone. None questions the system itself.

What Harvey Actually Argued

*The crisis was not a failure of the system.
It was the system working as designed.*

1

Capital needs growth

The system requires compound growth (around 3% a year). When one source dries up, it must find another.

2

Wages are squeezed

Since the 1970s, real wages stagnated while productivity rose. Workers produce more but earn the same.

3

Credit fills the gap

Workers cannot afford to consume, so capital lends them money to keep buying. The debt becomes the next crisis.

Harvey Through the CMS Lens

The video demonstrates all three pillars before we have named them

Denaturalisation

"Greed is human nature" makes the crisis look inevitable.

Harvey rejects this. The crisis was a structural outcome, not a natural event.

Anti-performativity

Mainstream economists asked: "How do we fix the system so it runs again?"

Harvey asked: "Should we fix a system whose own logic produces the crisis?"

Reflexivity

Each of the four explanations protects the group that proposed it.

Bankers blame regulators. Regulators blame models. Nobody questions their own position.

You just watched all three pillars in action, before learning their names.

Break

20 Minutes

Part 2

The Three Pillars of CMS

The Paper That Defined the Framework

Fournier, V. and Grey, C. (2000) *'At the critical moment: conditions and prospects for critical management studies'*

Human Relations, 53(1), pp. 7–32.

CMS already existed.

The term was introduced by Alvesson and Willmott in 1992. Critical work on management had been growing through the 1990s, drawing on labour process theory, the Frankfurt School, and Foucault. The first international CMS conference was held in 1999.

What this paper did was draw a line around it.

What makes management research "critical" rather than just "alternative"? Fournier and Grey proposed three criteria. If your work meets them, it is CMS. If not, it might be interesting, but it is not critical in this sense.

Their answer: three pillars.

Three Pillars of CMS

1

Denaturalisation

Questioning what everyone treats
as natural or inevitable

2

Anti-performativity

Refusing to ask only "how do we
make this work better?"

3

Reflexivity

Acknowledging that your own
position shapes what you see

1

Denaturalisation

Questioning what everyone treats as natural, necessary, or inevitable.

The Move

*"This looks like a fact.
It is actually a choice."*

When something is presented as "just the way things are," ask:

When did it become this way?

Who benefits from it staying this way?

CEO Pay: Natural or Chosen?

1965

21 : 1

CEO to worker ratio

2024

344 : 1

CEO to worker ratio

Japan: 10–15 : 1

Germany: ~50 : 1

UK: ~120 : 1

*If "the market" determines CEO pay, why do different markets
produce such different results?*

"Partners"

Starbucks calls every employee a "partner."

"If you're not happy at Starbucks, you can go work for another company."

Howard Schultz, CEO, to a worker raising concerns about unionisation.

Later ruled a violation of US labour law.

The word "partner" makes the arrangement look natural and equal.

It is neither.

996: Blessing or Exploitation?

9am to 9pm, 6 days a week.

"996 is a huge blessing. How do you achieve the success you want without extra effort?"

Jack Ma, 2019

Who called it a blessing?

An employee, or a billionaire?

China's Supreme People's Court ruled 996 illegal in 2021.

Even the state denaturalised it.



Discussion

Name one thing in your daily life
that everyone treats as
"just how things are."

Why might it not be natural?

2

Anti-performativity

Refusing to ask only "how do we
make this work better?"

The Move

*"Before asking how,
ask should."*

Traditional management studies is "performative."

It asks: how can we make this process more efficient?

Anti-performativity asks: should we be making this
more efficient if the cost falls on people who had no say?

The Cost of Efficiency

The Performative Question

*"How did Apple build
the most efficient
supply chain in history?"*

The Anti-performative Question

*"What did that
efficiency cost the
people assembling
the products?"*

Foxconn, Shenzhen. Suicide nets on factory buildings.

The same supply chain. Two different questions.

Guest Satisfaction Scores

Every luxury hotel measures guest satisfaction obsessively.

Performative

*"How do we get from
8.5 to 9.0?"*

Anti-performative

*"What does this system do
to the housekeeper?"*

Does a housekeeper serve guests better when she knows
one bad review from a difficult guest could cost her a bonus?

Or does the measurement system create fear and compliance
rather than genuine care?

Watch

The Extreme 996 Work Culture in China

[The Extreme 996 Work Culture in China - YouTube](#)

**“If you don’t
work 996,
others will
do it.”**

VICE



This Is Not New

Japan named it in 1969. The rest of the world still hasn't.

過労死

Karōshi

Death from overwork. First recorded case: 1969.

A 29-year-old shipping worker at Japan's largest newspaper. Stroke.

The same word exists in:

Chinese 过劳死 guòláosǐ

Korean 과로사 gwarosa

English *No equivalent term*

高橋まつり **Matsuri Takahashi, 1991–2015**

24 years old. Graduate trainee at Dentsu, Japan's largest advertising agency.

100+ hours of overtime in her final month. Died by suicide on Christmas Day 2015.

“It's 4 a.m. My body's trembling. I'm going to die. I'm so tired.”

Her social media post, weeks before she died.

If you cannot name it, you cannot challenge it.

Cultural Problem or Structural One?

If overwork kills people in Japan, China, Korea, the United States, and even parts of the UK, is it really about any one culture?

Japan

Karoshi since 1969
1,304 cases (2024)

China

996 culture
过劳死 guolaosi

South Korea

과로사 gwarosa
52-hr cap (2018)

United States

~120,000 stress deaths/yr
No legal vacation

United Kingdom

Longest hours in Europe
Opt-out culture

Meanwhile: Continental Europe (Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain) mandates 30+ days of paid leave, caps hours at 48 per week, and has the **lowest overwork mortality in the world.**

This is the denaturalisation move.

Overwork is not human nature. It is not culture. It is a structural choice.
Europe proves you can run successful economies without it.

But, Really?

Discussion

Why is this not a cultural problem?

1

It is not unique to one culture.

Japan, China, South Korea, the United States, parts of the UK. Five very different societies, the same pattern.

2

When the law changes, the "culture" changes.

The EU Working Time Directive capped hours at 48 per week. Overwork fell. Culture does not change overnight. Structures do.

3

The weakest protections produce the worst outcomes.

The countries with the highest overwork deaths are those with the weakest labour regulations, not those with a particular cultural trait.

But I disagree.

I think this IS a cultural problem. I work long hours. Not because a system forces me to. I do it because I am a Hongkonese (Stereotype?). That is not structure, that's culture.

So which is it? Discuss at your tables.

3

Reflexivity

Acknowledging that your own position shapes what you see.

The Move

*"You are not a
neutral observer."*

Your background, your position, your interests
shape what you see and what you recommend.

Everyone's perspective is partial.

The problem is when people pretend theirs is universal.

Neutral Advice?

McKinsey & Company

The world's most powerful management consulting firm.

"Data-driven." "Objective." "Independent."

They are paid to recommend change.

A consultant who concludes "everything is fine,
change nothing" does not get hired again.

*Their business model shapes their recommendations
before they look at a single number.*

Where You Stand Determines What You See

A factory owner

Scientific Management = efficiency

A factory worker

Scientific Management = control

A consultant

Scientific Management = a methodology to sell

A CMS scholar

Scientific Management = a power arrangement

None of them is wrong. All of them are partial.

The CMS Move

- | | | |
|---|--|---------------------|
| 1 | Here is what the theory says. | Define |
| 2 | Here is what it takes for granted. | Denaturalise |
| 3 | Here is who it serves. | Anti-performativity |
| 4 | Here is where I stand in relation to it. | Reflexivity |

This is your method for every remaining week of this module.

Your Turn

Apply the CMS lens to:

Performance Appraisals

1. What does the theory take for granted?
2. Who does it serve?
3. Where do you stand in relation to it?

5 minutes in small groups.



Discussion

Share your CMS analysis
of performance appraisals.

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Part 3

Looking Ahead

What We Built Today

You now have a lens.

Use it on everything.

Every theory we examine, every case we discuss,
every news story you read this semester:

What is taken for granted?

Who does it serve?

Where do you stand?

References

Fournier, V. and Grey, C. (2000) 'At the critical moment: Conditions and prospects for critical management studies', *Human Relations*, 53(1), pp. 7–32.

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Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2024) *White Paper on Karoshi Prevention* (過労死等防止対策白書). Tokyo: MHLW.

Kanai, A. (2009) 'Karoshi (work to death) in Japan', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 84(S2), pp. 209–216.

Office for National Statistics (2024) *Labour Market Overview, UK*. London: ONS.

Break

20 Minutes

Part 4

Tutorials

Today's Presentations

Party A

Scientific Management

Frederick Taylor

Party B

Bureaucracy

Max Weber

Remember: the CMS lens is on.

Next Week

Week 3

Leadership, Power, and Organisational Misbehaviour

Leadership theory looks neutral: "here are the traits of good leaders."

CMS asks: whose version of leadership dominates?

What power structures does it reinforce?

What happens when workers resist?

Before You Leave

Reading for Week 3

Working at a Cynical Distance: Implications for Power, Subjectivity and Resistance

Tutorial prep (Week 3 groups)

Party A: Human Relations (Mayo, Hawthorne)

Party B: Motivation (Maslow, McGregor)

Remember

The CMS lens is on. Use it on everything you read this week.

Thank you

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