

Cultural Change: Disruption, Innovation and Agency in Social Life

Melissa Cefkin, Nissan
Jennifer Englert, Xerox PARC
Emilie H. Hitch, Humphrey School of Public Affairs
Patricia Ensworth, Harborlight Management Services
Maryann McCabe, University of Rochester
Christine Z. Miller, Illinois Institute of Technology
Marijke Rijsberman, Coursera

National Association of Practicing Anthropologists
American Anthropological Association
Denver, Colorado
November 19, 2015

Session Abstract:

What causes cultural change? Practicing anthropologists working in design, consumer and organizational research find that culture involves the flow and movement of social and non-social agents (Latour 2005) that come together in a correspondence at a specific time and in a unique context (Ingold 2013). This session will consider cultural change from the perspective of global assemblages where agency is distributed among people, things, discourse and other elements. Metanarratives of cultural change such as evolution, diffusion, acculturation, ecology and world systems theory assume general processes and a more stable, consistent social life. Instead we focus upon dynamic forces of instability and disruption to explore how particular social and non-social elements come into association, establishing correspondence through the flow and movement of agents distributed among the assemblage. We seek to understand emergent correspondence from cultural practices in relation to technology, governance, exchange, ethics and values. The individual papers will identify specific trajectories of change (Collier and Ong 2005) that occur in the lived experience of consumers and members of organizations engaged in the design, marketing and delivery of products and services. By exploring instances in the practice of business anthropology, we aim to show how cultural change is historically situated and unpredictable but not accidental.

The Measurement Is The Message:

Social Structure, Technology and Ideology
In the Creation of Management Theory

Patricia Ensworth
Harborlight Management Services LLC
American Anthropological Association
November 19, 2015

Presentation Abstract:

Management training provides mid-career white-collar workers with new knowledge and skills more quickly and more strategically than they could acquire by enrolling in most academic programs. Although ongoing professional growth is an important motive, often students come to training because cultural changes have occurred either internally within their organizations or externally in the world at large. They perceive their expertise has been rendered obsolete, their relationships have been disrupted, and their personal agency has been constrained. While the technical aspects of management training curricula convey information that remains relatively stable over time – accounting, project management, quality control – these practical elements are embedded in a conceptual framework that does shift when new theories of management arise. Ethnographers who serve as consultants to a variety of businesses, develop training curricula, or teach courses for managers on the job become participant observers in a process of global assemblage, both documenting and facilitating emergent correspondences among diverse agents of organizational change. This paper analyzes several of the most popular management theories of the past century based upon the historical demand for training and level of awareness among white-collar workers. It explores the association of technological innovations and ideological discourses in the enactment of cultural changes through management practices.

Management Training Class



I'm a business anthropologist in private practice in New York City. For more than twenty years I worked at global financial services companies on information technology projects. Twelve years ago I started my own consulting firm and I also joined the faculty of the American Management Association. I teach training seminars and workshops for mid-career white collar managers who either decide or are told that they need to update and upgrade their knowledge.

Generally I spend two or three eight-hour days in a room with between five and twenty-five people. They talk about their organizations, their identities, their colleagues, and their problems. The ostensible subject matter might be technical (such as project management, business analysis, or quality control) or behavioral (such as team leadership, negotiation, or active listening). Regardless of the official curriculum, most of the students feel a need to enhance their personal agency, disrupt work practices, and/or accelerate innovation in their organizations.

As their careers advance they acquire more responsibility and power, and many also begin to perceive a misalignment between their default identities and the cultural habitus of their new managerial environment. Thus another important aspect of these workshops often involves the deliberate reconstruction of a student's emotional and cognitive Self. Experimentation with different modes of role performance, different interpretations of others' messages and actions, and different options for political impact occurs in a safe, neutral, laboratory-like setting with immediate peer-to-peer feedback.

Typical Questions

- 
- Operations procedures
 - Managing up
 - Communications protocols
 - Professional etiquette

Here are some examples of the variety of professional questions students have asked me in the past few months.

From a regulatory compliance manager at a pharmaceutical company: “When we’re developing a new procedure, at what point should we involve the operations managers so that they know soon enough to start training their people but late enough that they don’t interfere with the design?”

From an industrial engineering manager at an automobile parts factory: “How can we make senior management better understand the impact of their last-minute changes in the product specifications on the assembly line schedule?”

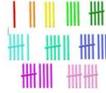
From a human resources manager at a consumer products company: “What can we do to persuade our Millennial junior staff that it’s more effective to resolve issues with Baby Boomer managers by calling them on the phone instead of sending them instant messages?”

Then there are the more personal questions.

From a female marketing director at a public relations firm: “Some of my junior male colleagues have been teasing me during meetings about my having a Resting Bitch Face. How should I respond?”

The answers to these questions vary according to each individual’s circumstances. They also vary according to the organization’s assemblage of social structures, technologies, and ideologies.

Office Work Activities



Counting



Conserving



Communicating



Controlling

To define the scope of our analysis, my data is derived from participant observation in and research on work practice communities whose activities direct the internal operations of for-profit organizations.

The essential activities of office work remain constant amid cultural change.

- “ Counting: Keeping track of sales revenue, expenses, profits and losses, inventory, equipment, customers, workers, etc.
- “ Conserving: Organizing and storing information, artifacts, materials, etc.
- “ Communicating: Sending and receiving messages to internal and external stakeholders using appropriate media, formats, and technologies.
- “ Controlling: Establishing workflows for objects and information, developing standards and procedures, issuing orders and ensuring compliance.

Office Work Stakeholders

Capital



Labor



Management

Accomplishing the goals of the organization through the work of other people who are paid to undertake tasks they would not do voluntarily.

In a for-profit enterprise, another constant element is the ongoing conflict and/or symbiosis between capital and labor.

- “ Capital: Shareholder owners of the company seek an optimal return on their investment through productivity, efficiency, and cost control.
- “ Labor: Salaried employees of the company seek an optimal work environment through compensation, motivation, health and safety, and sense of community.

The role of management is to mediate between these two interests. For the purpose of this analysis, our operating definition of management will be:

Accomplishing the goals of the organization through the work of other people who are paid to undertake tasks they would not do voluntarily.

Office Work Assemblages

- People – social structures and functions
 - Owners, workers, managers, government
- Things – technology
 - Devices, hardware, software, infrastructure, telecommunications, means of production
- Discourse – management theory ideology
 - Models, principles, standards, methods

The elements of the assemblage influencing office work culture and success fall into three broad categories with multiple components.

- “ First, the people: The social relations among the owners, workers, and managers within the organization, and also representatives of government who intervene periodically.
- “ Second, the things: All the technologies necessary to perform office work activities.
- “ Third, the discourse: The ideologies which establish the correspondences between the people and things.

Ideology is expressed as a management theory. In the context of the era when it was developed, a management theory can serve as an ethnographic description of cultural change affecting office work.

Product vs. Process



Frederick Taylor
One Best Way



Lillian Moller and Frank Gilbreth
Human Factors

The origin of management theory and its practice as a professional discipline are often traced to the publication in 1911 by Frederick Taylor of *The Principles of Scientific Management*. Taylor was a mechanical engineer, and he used a stopwatch to time workers performing tasks in the steel industry. He theorized that for each task there should be One Best Way to perform it. He recommended that management should determine the ideal method and then pay workers according to how they measured up.

When the movie camera became available, films showing groups of workers made it clear that an individual's body shape, strength, age, and other personal factors had an effect on his or her ability to accomplish a task in a particular environment. The industrial engineers Frank and Lillian Gilbreth adapted Taylor's methodologies to perform time-and-motion studies of worker fatigue. Their research on human factors such as physical variation and emotional motivation established the conceptual foundations for ergonomics, industrial psychology, and market research.

The conflict between Taylor and the Gilbreths over the most effective methods for measuring job performance set the terms of a capital vs. labor debate which continues to this day: to what extent should the evaluation focus on product or process?

Office Work Assemblages Data Model

| Date | Device | Inventor | Business Factors | Social Factors | Theory | Author | Comments | Performance Measures |
|------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1880-1890 | | | | | | | | |
| 1865 | Transcontinental commercial jet | Boring 787 | -Slide and high employment -Reason of failure to employment in supporting roles -Growth of U.S. multinational corporations -Growth of consumer demand stimulated by advertising and mass media | -Dipping prosperity -Continuation of Berlin Wall -Cold war -Economic crisis -Economic crisis -Economic crisis | Theory Y and Theory Z | Douglas McGregor | The Abolition of Man or Disillusionment of an American Intellectual | Progress in organization from perspective of how to create a self-fulfilling system based on the appropriate approach to supervision. Ability for an employee to make progress in collaboration. Clarity and extent of communication. Willingness to learn new equipment. Understanding of computer potential. |
| 1865 | Photocopier | Xerox 914 | | | Situational Leadership | Kenneth Blanchard & Paul Hersey | | |
| 1901 | Electronic typewriter | IBM | | | Stages of Group Development | Bruce Tuckman | | |
| 1903 | Push-button phone | AT&T Bell System | | | | | | |
| 1904 | Color multi-line copier | IBM 360 | | | | | | |
| 1904 | First multi-line copier | Xerox | | | | | | |
| 1905 | Cubicle | Herman Miller Corp. | | | | | | |
| 1960 | COBOL standard | ANSI | | | | | | |
| 1970-1979 | | | | | | | | |
| 1971 | Microprocessor | Intel | | | Systems Thinking | Gerard Verbeek | An Introduction to General Systems Thinking | Transition of human workflow into digital workflow. IT and right socioeconomic of repairing requirements. Difference in organizational. Focus on cost-cutting. Acceptance of professional norms. Participation in computer games. Interest in digital technologies. |
| 1972 | Podcast calculator | Hewlett-Packard | | | Software Management Principles | Frederick Brooks | The Mythical Man-Month | |
| 1972 | Prog game | Atari | | | | | | |
| 1973 | Mobile telephone | Motorola | | | | | | |
| 1974 | Personal database | IBM - Rational/Oracle | | | | | | |
| 1975 | Microcomputer | Microsoft and Apple founded | | | | | | |
| 1976 | Adventure M&D game | Dan Woods | | | | | | |
| 1977 | CRT computer monitor | TRG, Commodore, Apple | | | | | | |
| 1978 | Word processor for microcomputer | Microsoft WordStar | | | | | | |
| 1979 | Spreadsheet for microcomputer | VisiCorp VisiCalc | | | | | | |
| 1980-1989 | | | | | | | | |
| 1981 | MS-DOS personal computer | IBM/Microsoft | | | Wally Curves | GE, Jack Welch | Bell curve of employee performance | "Rank and Yank" - top staff are fired, mid and lower staff are retained. |
| 1981 | Computer mouse | Xerox 8010C standard | | | Six Sigma | Motorola Corp. | DMAC method with Voice of the Customer | Operational verification and compliance with methodology. |
| 1982 | Laptop computer | IBM/Apple 1015 - Compaq | | | ISO 9000 quality standards | International Standards Organization | Global standard | Operational verification and compliance with methodology. |
| 1982 | Invented TCP/IP | US DOD | | | CBM | US DOD, Varta Hungary | Software engineering maturity | Operational verification and compliance with methodology. |
| 1984 | Inventing multi-functional | Radio Shack Cop. etc. | | | ITIL | UK Central Computer & Telecomm Agency | IT providing value to business | Operational verification and compliance with methodology. "Power User" IT specialist senior management. Balance for bell curve analysis. |

File available at: www.enswortheditions.com

Here is an excerpt from a data model developed to analyze interdependencies among social factors, new technologies, and management theory during different historical periods over the past century. It's a work-in-progress, a living document, and a link to the latest file is provided on the slide. Please feel free to send me your comments and ideas.

To summarize the findings, let's consider examples from a couple of decades.

1916-1929



- Social trends
 - Prosperity, industrialization
- Technologies
 - Assembly line
- Management theories
 - Elton Mayo
 - Productivity experiments
 - Walter Shewart
 - Statistical quality control

The earliest management theories arose at a time when the office environment typically resembled a piecework factory. After World War I, the assembly line became a more prevalent mode of industrial production, and office activities likewise were designed for efficient workflow. The theories of psychologist Elton Mayo were based upon his experiments to improve productivity. The statistician Walter Shewart proposed holistic methods to improve quality.

The Great Depression and World War II increased the federal government's oversight of day-to-day business operations. Management theory consisted of ways first to find work for the unemployed and then to defeat the enemy.

1946-1959



- Social trends
 - Postwar expansion, prosperity, corporate social responsibility, decentralized governance
- Technologies
 - Direct dial phone
 - Industrial mainframe computer
- Management theories
 - Peter Drucker
Management by Objectives
 - W. Edwards Deming
Holistic quality processes

As the World War II came to an end, returning veterans brought battlefield attitudes into the workplace, along with a belief that the U.S. political model of decentralized federal-state division of power was a viable method of corporate governance. Two new technologies were available to business: direct dial telephones and industrial mainframe computers. Peter Drucker's system of Management By Objectives suggested that subordinates and supervisors should collaborate with each other to develop individual SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic, Time-Bound). W. Edwards Deming, after helping to rebuild Japanese industry and later advising American companies, demonstrated that quality was not a goal which workers could achieve on their own: management needed to create the organizational and environmental conditions for workers to succeed at doing their jobs well.

1960-1969



Photo credit: "Mad Men"

- Social trends
 - Prosperity, counterculture, consumer growth, civil rights, feminism, ecology
- Technologies
 - Photocopiers and fax machines
 - Push-button phones
 - Selectric typewriters
 - Office mainframe computer
- Management theories
 - Douglas McGregor Theory X and Theory Y
 - Kenneth Blanchard & Paul Hersey Situational Leadership
 - Bruce Tuckman Stages of Group Development

The 1960's introduced photocopiers, fax machines, push-button phones, Selectric typewriters, and office mainframe computers. It was a prosperous, experimental, free-spirited time. Management theory advised supervisors on how to create a trusting office environment where workers would collaborate harmoniously and achieve self-actualization.

1970-1979



- Social trends
 - Recession, defeat in Vietnam, oil crisis, stagflation, layoffs
- Technologies
 - Word processors and spreadsheets
 - Relational databases
 - Networked microcomputers
- Management theories
 - Gerald Weinberg
Systems Thinking
 - Frederick Brooks
The Mythical Man Month

The oil crisis and recession during the 1970's instilled a more sober atmosphere. Networked CRT microcomputers, relational databases, word processors and spreadsheets appeared. The most influential management theories explained how computer should be integrated into the organization.

1980-1989



- Social trends
 - Reaganomics, shareholder value, AIDS, War on Drugs
- Technologies
 - MS-DOS PC
 - Voicemail
 - Office automation
- Management theories
 - Jack Welch, GE
Vitality Curve
 - Motorola
Six Sigma quality control
 - Government agencies
ISO, CMM, ITIL IT standards

Personal computers, voicemail, and workflow automation changed the environment of the office in the 1980's. Reaganomics promoted shareholder value as the mission of the corporation. Management theorists divided into two camps. The "rank-and-yank" Vitality Curve for disposing of less productive employees became popular among executives. Workers depending upon the pervasive information systems favored Six Sigma process improvement methods and government-sponsored standards of quality.

1990-1999



Photo credit: "Office Space"

- Social trends
 - Prosperity, growth of internet, H1-B guestworkers, Y2K
- Technologies
 - Graphical user interface (GUI)
 - E-mail
 - Search engines
- Management theories
 - Human-Computer Interaction
 - Lean Manufacturing
 - Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK)

The 1990's brought renewed prosperity, the growth of the internet, an influx of H1B temporary immigrants, and the Y2K panic. Office workers learned to multitask using a GUI, to communicate by e-mail, and to seek information using search engines. The transition to digital commerce inspired much creativity and innovation, yet also caused distraction and confusion. Management theory focused upon fundamentals of engineering and project management to get the job done, and upon understanding the interaction between human beings and computers.

2000-2009



Photo credit: "Margin Call"

- Social trends
 - 9/11 attacks, dot-com bust, War on Terror, financial crisis
- Technologies
 - Smartphones
 - Cloud computing
 - Social media
- Management theories
 - Globalization
 - Data Analytics
 - Design Thinking
 - Agile Management

Business in the new millennium started badly with the dot-com bust, then got worse following the 9/11/01 terrorist attacks. Wartime expenditures by the federal government and complex derivative investments created by the financial services industry boosted the economy until the catastrophic market crash. Office workers acquired smartphones. They began telecommuting more frequently. Their data storage moved to the cloud, and social media created virtual on-line communities of users and customers. Some management theorists explained how to cope with the decline of American political and economic might and how to apply the science of data analytics. Others advocated Design Thinking to create better products and services, and Agile Management to reduce work process bureaucracy imposed by rigid technical standards and project methodologies.

2010-now



Photo credit: *New York Times*

- Social trends
 - Inequality, gig economy, cyberwarfare and cybercrime
- Technologies
 - Laptops and tablets
 - Internal surveillance
 - Biometric devices
- Management theories
 - Cybersecurity
 - People Analytics
 - Lean Startup tactics
 - Gamification

Recovery from the financial crisis propelled the growth of the sharing economy in the 2010's. Unemployment remained high, inequality increased, and a two-tier gig economy evolved with some employees in high-tech companies prospering while many more part-time contractors struggled to afford a middle-class lifestyle. Cyberwarfare, cybercrime, and data leaks raised concerns about the future of digital technologies. Office work became more mobile as laptops and tablets offered adequate data storage. Employees in large organizations grew accustomed to having all their activities on the internet and intranet tracked and monitored. Some workers wore biometric devices which documented their emotional states, physical movements, and social behaviors. Management theory provided advice on cybersecurity and the application of People Analytics. Because one consequence of so much surveillance and regulation was a decline in businesses innovation, theorists also suggested methods of leading startup ventures and making work more fun through gamification.

Applications of Research

- Diagnose misalignments between goals and methods
- Identify appropriate management theory
- Select effective performance evaluation metrics
- Implement strategy based upon context of specific social structure and technology
- Enhance management's expertise

Apart from historical perspective, what is the point of gathering and analyzing all this data about the assemblage of factors producing cultural change in office work?

An important reason is that it helps us diagnose and resolve misalignments between an organization's goals and the methods by which it measures its employees' performance.

Each of these management theories comes with definitions of success, evaluation criteria, and metrics. Performance reviews are probably the quickest method of implementing cultural change in an organization: if you reward people for acting in a certain way, they often do. Executives need to be aware of the management theories and apply the right one to obtain the results they desire.

But this doesn't always happen.

Sometimes it's a question of an organization imposing a one-size-fits-all approach. However, just as within a particular country there may be communities at different stages of development – nomadic hunter-gatherers, subsistence farmers, urban professionals – within a large organization there are divisions and functions with different social structures and technologies. Some units today have issues that might be best addressed by the ideas of the 1960's Stages of Group Development, or the 1980's Six Sigma, or even by Frederick Taylor's One Best Way.

Sometimes it's a question of ignorance. The executives in charge of deciding how to measure employee performance in their unit are rarely experts in management theory. They may know a lot about engineering, or marketing, or finance, but not understand why all their most talented staff are quitting, and they need help.



That's where anthropologists come in. Our education and our skillset can unpack the global assemblage of factors. We can identify the distribution of agency and recommend how to reconfigure the correspondences. In doing so, we influence the trajectory of change.