
Organisational performance: A view from the arts

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Abstract (Article Summary)

This paper suggests that most understandings of organisational performance appears to be about developing a set of rules or prescriptions, that need to be followed if successful performance is to be achieved. It proposes that organisations are still attempting to apprehend and represent the world utilising strategies and understandings that were predominant in the early part of the 20th-century and thus exerted a massive influence during the infancy of management thinking. Influences, which despite their undoubted success in the past, may no longer be as appropriate for the current organisational environment. We then demonstrate how other fields, in particular literature and art have moved on from this position, suggesting that it may be possible to draw on their experiences and explorations in order to gain new understandings of organisational performance.

Full Text (7,524 words)

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Organisational Performance: a view from the arts

In the early part of the 20th-century a great upheaval took place in many fields of human endeavour, with qualities, values, or techniques that had been relied on in previous centuries to provide meaning, no longer retaining their efficacy. Traditional frames of reference such as perspective in painting, Euclidian geometry, tonality in music, temporal sequence in narrative, unvarying temporal and spatial reference frames in physics, were challenged and overthrown by new forms of understanding.

We intend to suggest that this tidal wave of change has passed over most of our current understanding of organisational performance, leaving it in a stagnated pool of passé thinking. This paper proposes that organisations are still attempting to apprehend and represent the world utilising strategies and understandings that were predominant in the early part of the 20th-century and thus exerted a massive influence during the infancy of management thinking. Influences, which despite their undoubted success in the past, may no longer be as appropriate for the current organisational environment. It is intended to demonstrate how thinking in other fields have embraced new values and understandings, and have thus moved on from these outmoded forms of thought, in attempts to develop more apposite ways of engaging with the world.

To do this we draw upon Stephen Kern's idea of 'conceptual distance', and Bakhtin's similar notion of 'ideological adequation' to demonstrate the values underpinning the thinking in some of these areas, and to show that they are quite different from those of most organisational thought. Kern (1983, p. 7) suggests that "there is greater conceptual distance between the thinking of an architect and that of a philosopher on a given subject than there is between the thinking of two philosophers, and I assume that any generalisations about the thinking of an age is the more persuasive the greater conceptual distance between the sources on which it is based". Thus considering thinking that is apparently, conceptually separated from each other, may allow us to identify underpinning values, that act as an aid to successful understanding in our current environment. To do this we intend to utilise the fields of painting and literary narrative, showing how their understandings have radically changed from those still in use in organisations. Drawing on this we then go on to suggest that organisations may be able to exploit this body of knowledge in order to further its own understanding.

Stagnation

The last forty years or so of Management literature demonstrates, a desire, or evidence of, a striving toward increasingly effective performance in organisations. Despite this attention it might be claimed that the whole notion of what is performance remains elusive, with few definitions which adequately encompass the character of performance in organisations. A closer examination of the management literature suggests that much of what is considered organisational performance, would be much better viewed as a feature of the measurement technique selected, and as such is better seen as part of a self-referential discourse that acts to define the object of study. A discourse, which it can be clearly seen it is anchored in a mode of perception dominant from the Renaissance until the early 1900's.

This discourse is about providing evidence of, or prescriptions for, or remedies to, organisational action that supposedly, no, that are themselves convinced, will undoubtedly lead to improved, superior, optimal, fantastic (etc.) outcomes. Looming large within this diatribe lie rules and regulations that specify consistent levels of action. Rules that regulate a constancy that provides stakeholders with feelings of confidence in the quality of the organisation and the service or goods, that they are producing, sampling or seeking to purchase. We can find evidence of the role of rules and regulations ranging from safety to health and from quality to service.

These rules, it might be argued, are manifestations of the desire by the managements of organisations to seemingly impose an appearance of 'seamlessness'. Thus performance in organisations becomes perceived as a seamless progression of the quantitative, often financial, measures that the various prescriptions for successful performance have mandated as the accepted symbols, or sign posts, of that performance. For management, the achievement of this reduction, where all the steps naturally follow on, prevents personnel from considering alternative, perhaps contradictory or deviating, courses of action, and thus the organisation can guarantee, what they perceive as, optimal

standards and quality. This is the narrative, a story of striving for efficiency and excellence, which organisations, the public and so many academics find irresistibly seductive. It is to the source of this seduction that we now turn.

THE SEDUCTIVENESS OF AN EASY STORY

For us, Gombrich (1982) encapsulates the reason for this situation when he describes how a musician reads and understands a musical score with surprising ease and at amazing speed:

does he not have to take in information at an uncanny rate? Certainly the feat is admirable, but it is only possible because the notes of the score... are not unconnected signs. Music is an art that follows certain laws or rules, which enable the musician to scan the score with certain expectations. Though he cannot know what to expect in the next bar, he knows at least that many possibilities are ruled out. Indeed if any of those occurred he would probably disregarded it as a misprint. In reading a familiar language of course, we proceed a similar way, looking ahead for cues to conform to our expectations and filling in the remainder more or less from experience ... assumptions of this kind are so ingrained in us that it needs quite a jolt to prevent our interpretation from running along these convenient grooves. (p. 154)

It is this ease, the seductiveness of a clear path to follow, that organisations and their stakeholders appear to crave, to be able to read organisational performance, quickly and easily, allowing judgements to be made, decisions actioned, and to thus continue the onward march to success. It is a craving firmly anchored in the Western tradition of thought since the Renaissance, and manifest in its discourse obsessed with “power and knowledge, its constraint of language to primarily symbolic function, its ethic of winning, its categorical and dualistic modes of definition, its belief in the quantitative and objective, its linear time and individual subject, and above all its common media of exchange (time, space, money) which guarantee certain political and social systems” (Ermarth, 1992, p. 7).

To satisfy this craving for success and ease of understanding, has required the development of ‘*rules to follow*’, that through defining what is acceptable inform our expectations, and allow us to predetermine the range of potential possibilities, discarding in advance much of ‘*organisational action*’, and like our musician earlier disregarding anything that does not conform to our schema as a ‘*misprint*’ or irrelevant. The essence of utilising a set of rules is that it narrows the area for consideration, eliminates and simplifies. Here it is suggested that the modernist rule based understanding of organisations is so embedded in management culture, that its ingrained assumptions are very rarely recognised let alone considered. Thus the ‘*reading*’ of organisational performance within these frameworks requires the (often unaware) dismissal, of organisational actions and characteristics that do not conform, as ‘*misprints*’ or irrelevancies. However it may be that what these rules encourage to be, or insist are, dismissed is far from irrelevant, and may even be vital, to understanding and survival for

organisations into the 21st-century.

This may even help explain the enormous success of the many prescriptions for outstanding organisational performance based on simple rules that ease understanding. Whether it is Peters and Waterman's (1982) rules for excellence, the mantra of *Business Process Reengineering* (Hammer, 1990), or the promises of management in a minute. Furthermore it may intimate the source of many management difficulties, and provide pointers to explain the sometimes spectacular demise of Peters and Waterman's 'excellent companies' or the devastation caused by much *Business Process Reengineering*.

Furthermore the search for sets of rules, to solve the riddle of how to produce 'outstanding performance' dominates the performance literature. Tsoukas (1995, p. 5) highlights how management thinking is dominated by "search for the regularities exhibited by social systems, [to] establish their validity and codify them in the form of rules (that is, 'if, then' statements) which managers would then be able to put into practice with confidence". A position clearly established by March and Sutton for the field of research into organisational performance, who demonstrated that "most studies of organisational performance define performance as a dependent variable and seek to identify variables that produce variations in performance" (March & Sutton, 1997, p. 698), and the continuing ubiquity of which, we invite the reader to confirm for themselves, by simply browsing a few recent issues of highly regarded journals such as the *Strategic Management Journal*, the *Academy of Management Journal* or the *Administrative Science Quarterly*. This body of literature amounts to a search for the if/then rules that will hopefully allow the improvement of performance. It implies that once the correct relationships are established, then simply by following the requisite prescriptions, such as for example amending board member diversity (Siciliano, 1996) or market and quality orientation (Sussan & Johnson, 1997), it will enable the holy grail of improved performance to be achieved.

Yet, despite the continued ascendancy of this type of approach it is not without its critics, we next examine some manifestations of disquiet with the dominance of rules and prescription, before going on to illustrate how both narrative and painting have faced similar misgivings with these forms of representation and understanding, and have thus attempted to overcome their comparable dilemmas.

ORGANISATIONAL DISQUIET

Evidence of dissatisfaction with the current situation in organisations could be heard in a recent edition of the BBC radio programme *Analysis*, entitled *Rough Counting*, which was broadcast in November 1999 (Hassler, 1999). A number of leading academics, industrialists, consultants and government appointed heads of regulatory bodies, discussed the increasing trend within organisations to become *rule-governed*. In essence the programme revealed, the increasing unease of all parties, with organisation's penchant for turning to rules, and away from their own abilities of 'competence'. They

seem to be searching out every opportunity to turn toward government for further guidance, and in particular rules to prescribe their behaviour. It is almost tantamount to a fear of operating in a 'space without rules', an unwillingness to engage with a depth of possibilities. Time and time again the former heads of the regulatory bodies lamented the inability of a wide variety of organisations to do more than adhere to these rules!

As Colette Bowe (Executive Chairperson of Save & Prosper, and former head of the Personal Investment Authority) explained, some organisation's even requested more rules.

BOWE: actually we would like some prescription please. Because if we are going to get into serious trouble as many firms in this industry have done, if we are going to be fined, because of things like the practices of our sales force, we need to know precisely what it is, you regulators who have these draconian powers, are expecting us to do. Now I always very much regretted that, when I was a regulator, I used to constantly say to people don't keep asking us for rules, don't keep asking us for rules, you know what the fundamental duty is, do it. But this industry has said, we would like prescription please, we want to be sure. It requires I think, enormous confidence in your own professionalism to be able to say, thanks fine, I know what it means to know my customers, leave it to me to work out what that means.

A point further emphasised by Clare Spottiswoode, (member of the management team of PA Consulting, London and former Regulator of the Gas Industry) and Peter Miller (Professor of Accounting, London School of Economics)

SPOTTISWOODE: You can't run a company with a whole set of rules, what you have to do is say, what are we trying to achieve her

MILLER: Without doubt one of my favourite phrases is 'What is counted, counts', and as soon as we start counting something we tend to become fixed on it.

Even the leaders of professions that are built around control and prescription find organisation's current fixation on rules disturbing. Mike Jeans (President of CIMA) berates business's dependence on "successive waves of laws and rules" (Times, 2001, p. 15), suggesting that this is problematic, in that these systems of control, and the mindsets that go with it, are "unlikely to build a future; rather, it preserves the past and, perhaps, the present" (ibid). He identifies that organisations "are seeking ways of releasing organisational potential through flexibility, empowerment, valuing diversity, working as teams, challenging the status quo, etc" (ibid) and as such realise conventions based on rules and control are inhibitive and obsolete, and need to be '*blown up*'.

Making a similar point on the problematic nature of rule based conceptions of performance, Dobson (1999) argues that attempts at developing rule based systems of performing (in this case through rules of business ethics) is futile. That any attempts to do

so flounder when confronted with the difficulties in operating in a business reality that is ‘*complex, multifarious, and ephemeral*’ and thus essentially ‘*chaotic and unpredictable*’.

It is to two different fields of understanding, art and literature, that have also faced the difficulties inherent in the fixed nature of a rules informed approach to apprehending the world, to which we turn to further explore this phenomenon.

RULES AND PERSPECTIVE IN PAINTING

Art, and in particular painting, provides for us evidence for our argument. For painting too was stifled in the past by its heavy reliance on rules. The pre-occupation of artists for these rules revealed for many of them the limitations of their art and yet still they wished to develop its potential – it is with this experience in mind we seek to reveal how as students of management and organisations, we might gain from their trials and tribulations. In contrast to the earlier discussion of organisations, painting has not shown the same degree of fear of rules, and the possibilities and problems it may present, despite arguably parallel historical precedents.

However, for over four centuries painting was also to a great degree dominated by the rigid rules and lines of perspective, as expounded in Alberti’s defining text of 1435, *De Pictura*, and which came to define the rules for determining acceptable verisimilitude. He likened a painted picture to an open window, thus a picture, in his view, should be made to seem as if it were a pane of transparent glass through which we look into an imaginary space extending into depth. This along with parallel developments in the Flemish schools, expounded by amongst others Jan Van Eyck, directed the future of the painting clearly down the rigid path of rule-laden perspective.

The rules of modern representation and scale preclude the portrayal of individuals inside buildings, or out of scale, to promote recognition and understanding prevalent before the reign of perspective . All that is not encapsulated by the perspective delineated segment of reality is obscured and marginalised. As Stella proposes, “something as simple as a mobile viewpoint seems to be an anathema. We are so conditioned by the window of perspective that we stand motionless in front of it, waiting for painting to organise itself according to our acquired habits” (Stella, 1986, p. 51). The space in painting became available to eyesight alone; intuition or insight, to apprehend understanding became redundant. This can be illustrated if we examine Caneletto’s picture below (Figure 1). Here we can infer that the building and walls contain and hide individuals within, and behind, importance or allegory play no role in their portrayal, they are inviolably circumscribed by line and scale



Consequently we sense that artists around this time were seeking to persuade observers and other painters of their skill in depicting the 'real'. The absence in earlier paintings, of perspective, tended to leave the observer with the impression that the image was flat. The image lacked realism. With the initial introduction of perspective, the depth and richness of object becomes more apparent, more alive – it almost reaches out to the viewer "[A] single network of lines can create an effect of depth that implies that the negation, or - as the phenomenologists would put it - the neantization, of the plane onto which it is projected, to the gain of the image inscribed there" (Damisch, 1994, p. 11). Here the image almost engages the viewer and persuades them of its realism. With this technique, and for the viewer to grasp meaning and generate understanding from a painting requires only knowledge and application of the rules of perspective . It enabled a separation of not only the artist from the reality they are attempting to depict, but a separation of the viewer, spatially, temporally and culturally from that which they are trying to understand. The separation, despite requiring rules if understanding is to be realised, provides for a smoother and less taxing mode of interpretation. The seductiveness of this approach which allowed 'an easy form of interpretation', where only a knowledge and application of a set of universally appropriate rules, was necessary, encouraged what could be considered a form of 'collusion' between both artist and viewer. It led to the atrophy of the more strenuous requirements for contextual understanding and informed interpretation. Representations informed by the rules of perspective became considered as a 'true depiction' for most of society, the idealisation and simplification inherent in this practise, unrecognised or conveniently forgotten.

Such was the seductiveness of this form of persuasion it soon became codified into a set of rules for the achievement of persuasive perspective, rules that became ossified into an array of almost unchallengeable prescriptions for artists, if they wanted to participate in what was considered by many the only acceptable realist representation. Thus painting itself became caught up in one set of rules, a situation that may be considered analogous to the illustration we gleaned from the BBC *Rough Counting* radio programme of management's craving for rules to follow, and the dominance of the performance literature by a search for the rules that produce effective performance.

THE PERSPECTIVAL UNDERSTANDING OF MANAGEMENT

It has been argued that the emergence of perspective into Western consciousness during the 14th century is one of the defining moments in the birth of what has become known as modernism . The advent of the lens of perspective, brought to the world a sense of space, and spatiality. Human vision became conditioned to perceive space, and in particular those features which lie within this space, in a quite different way. As Ivins explains, methods of perspectival pictorial representation have become pervasive as they:

have provided symbols, repeatable in invariant form, for representation of visual awareness, and a grammar of perspective which made it possible to establish logical relations not only within the system of symbols but between that system and the forms and locations of the objects that it symbolises. (pp. 12-13)

This abstraction enabled a depiction of space as being measurable, and as such reducible, to the measurements involved. Thus the separation of humanity from the object of perception, along with the depiction of that object using the symbolic forms of perspective, has fuelled a drive “to measure everything measurable and to make what is not measurable capable of being measured” (Palmer, 1977, p. 22). Such was the strength of this move toward measurement, that those aspects which could not be measured, for example intuition, magic and the occult, are pushed aside or consigned to some form stigmatised category [i.e. witchcraft, superstition, guesswork]. Thus, this spatialisation, and the agenda to make everything visualisable, and therefore measurable has had consequences beyond that of pictorial representation . As Damisch (1994, p. 28) suggests, perspective can be considered “as something that is productive of effects, in so far as its capacity, its power to inform extends well beyond the limits of the era in which it was born.” He elaborates that “[W]ithout any doubt, our period is ... massively 'informed' by the perspective paradigm”.

This perspectival understanding, emphasises the separation of object from observer and attempts the division of the separated object into measurable terms. Which has lead to the eclipse and marginalisation of phenomenon that cannot be easily spatially depicted and reliably measured. For art the lines of perspective, define and illuminate part of a scene, bring into scrutiny certain aspects of the whole, aspects that are ascribed an

unwarranted primacy. Yet for all that it illuminates, it also casts shadows. Perspective obscures, hides behind lines/corners, diminishes and minimises much of the totality it attempts to represent. Rigid rules prescribe what can and cannot be seen, what to disregard as irrelevant, size and scale are incontestably linked to the measures of space and distancing employed. It dictates how reality may be depicted, and which part of that reality is therefore given legitimacy. The unbearable constraints of these rules are frequently illustrated using the famous Durer woodcut (Figure 2), "in effect, it shows an artist caught up in a veritable pillory as he draws the contours of a (nude) model in front of him, gazing at her through a transparent, squared screen, his eye immobile at the tip of a stiletto" (Damisch, 1994, p. 36). It shows how the representation is produced utilising the rules of perspective, which are physically manifest in the mechanical devices employed.



As intimated earlier, management as a discipline emerged from these same insights, where all behaviours could be reduced to measurement and evaluation. It was the enthusiasm of F. W. Taylor (amongst others) and his methods – which were at least popular with managements – that drove its development down the road of striving to place all of its activities into classifiable categories and controllable variables. We see it all around us in organisations, their presence, their past and their future. Management and organisations are dominated, and assessed by, scientific rules and procedures. Thus just as with Durer's artist, who's representation is constricted by the rules and technology of perspective, so to is management's understanding, through its perspectival informed, modernist technologies, of rationality and measurement. As Peter Miller (Professor of Accounting from the London School of Economics) said in the BBC radio programme introduced above:

"Without doubt one of my favourite phrases is 'What is counted counts', as soon as we start counting something we tend to become fixed on it".

LITERARY CONVENTIONS

Here we explore how in the field of literature similar conventions, in the form of the realist novel, dominated literature's approach to representing reality, before it underwent a major discursive shift during the intellectual upheaval of the early twentieth century.

Prior to this discursive shift, novelistic conventions were dominated by aesthetic canon that supported and were supported by, the principal cultural values elaborated earlier. The primary assumption of novelistic intent was to “mirror reality, especially to reflect the unity and integrity of the world” (Vargish & Mook, 1998, p. 38), in an almost exact parallel to the role of perspective in painting. For readers of these novels it was the role of the narrator to stand at the single point perspective, and ‘tell it as it is/was. Thus just as viewers of paintings ‘colluded’ with the artist so a “fundamental understanding between the reader and author was sustained: the narrator narrates the real world, an ‘objective’ world, that exists independent of the narrator’s perception, whether that world be natural, social or psychological” (Vargish & Mook, 1998, p. 39).

Elizabeth Ermarth (1983) elegantly and effectively argues, that a similar act of collusion occurs between this narrator (whether explicit or implicit) and the readers, in a commonality with that of painter and viewer. Thus the narrator acts in, and or, evokes a world, underpinned by the same values as those of perspectival representation. The dominance and ubiquity of the realist novel, along with the fame and familiarity of its great protagonists, such as Bronte, Dickens, Eliot, Tolstoy, Twain and Flaubert, suggests very little is needed in the way of further exemplification. So, for a suitably brief exposition, it is to one of these great exponents that we turn. Dickens, in his writing “however different [his] moods, what informs his evocations is always an unabating interest in this world, and in this society as a thing real and, as to its reality, wholly unproblematic” (Stern, 1973, p. 5). Thus in for example *Little Dorrit* “the various parallels of plot, scene, and image conspire to suggest that deeper continuities unify the world of experience despite the failures of individuals” (Ermarth, 1983, p. 57). In this manner Dickens typifies the realist novelist who “by successfully coordinating apparently disparate elements ... asserts the existence of a common ordering system; apparently unrelated particulars sooner or later reveal a connectedness, a pattern” (ibid). Thus Dickens produces a picture of the world, that for the reader is the one true depiction, one that the reader would undoubtedly recognise if they were in Dickens’s position.

NOVELISTIC CONVENTIONS OVERTURNED

In a parallel to Cézanne’s place in the vanguard of the momentous changes in painting (to which we come later), Henry James may be considered as breaking fresh ground in the realm of fiction. Not to be constrained by the dictates of convention, and to continue to suffer the frustrations these dictates imposed on authors in their attempts to more richly represent the changing world, James in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898/1998), undermines many of those conventions. For him “there is no realist ‘objectifier’ here, no superior reference frame against which the systems can be measured. In fact the absence of any ‘objectifier,’ of any privileged point of view, is symbolized in the story itself by the inaccessibility of the owner/employer, the absent god of the tale. There is no Providence for the reader to look to, no omniscient narrator, no empirical testing or verification”(Vargish & Mook, 1998, p. 46). The story provides contradictory narratives, of the insane governess/narrator and that of real ghosts, both with equal validity. It provides no one truth, no single point perspective that ‘tells it as it is’, despite many

creative and fervent, if ultimately futile attempts to do so. If anything with this story he presents an exceptional, if implicit, disparagement of the mental rigidity that is unable to tolerate this contradiction and insists on attempting its resolution.

Bakhtin makes a similar point about the writing of Dostoevsky where he suggests “we don’t have a great number of destinies and lives developing within a single objective world, enlightened by the consciousness of the author alone; rather we have a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights, each with its own world, combining in the unity of an event but none the less without fusing” (Bakhtin as cited in Todorov, 1984, p.104). It is this heterogeneity along with the introduction of heteroglossia where multiple languages and discourses act “like mirrors that face each other, each reflecting in its own way a piece, a tiny corner of the world, force us to guess at and grasp for a world behind their mutually reflecting aspects that is broader, more multi-levelled, containing more and varied horizons than would be available to a single language or single mirror” (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 414-415) that helps bring a new set of values and concepts to the role of narrative.

If Henry James broke the ground for a new form of narrative, with Dostoevsky’s heterogeneity and heteroglossia along with Joyce’s (1914/1981) multiple narratives pointing the way, Franz Kafka could be considered as having rearranged the landscape. The publication of *The Penal Colony* (Kafka, 1919/1999a), as well as much of his other writing, presented a series of narratives divorced from the earlier conventions of understanding. Here the story is packed with possible meanings, so much so that any potential primary meaning is dissolved in the very multiplicity of possibilities. He shatters the inherent temporal continuity of earlier writing through the introduction of temporal and spatial disjunctions, until “you never know what you are going to find in your own house” and you finish before you have begun (Kafka, 1999b, pp. 220 & 225). A particular favourite convention subject to collapse within Kafka’s narratives are attempts at measurement, quantification or understanding of ‘alternate’ systems from within an ‘other’, any attempts to do so seemed doomed to failure (Vargish & Mook, 1999). In an unnerving description of the ‘metamorphosis’ of Gregor Samsa into a gigantic insect (Kafka, 1999c) we are provided with the implication that any attempt at the perception of reality is likely to lead to ambiguity. Thus ambiguity, derived from the (multiple)perceptions of multiple realities becomes not only a narrative technique but a constituent theme of that narrative.

However it is fundamental to make clear that this new form of narrative, does not make redundant or discard that of the old, so much as incorporates it, because essential to the strength and vitality of its nature is its very diversity. A diversity enhanced by these contributing frameworks that help serve to generate the ambiguity, multiplicity and incongruities that are part of its essence. Again Kafka (1999c) serves to illustrate this, The Metamorphosis gains its strength through, traditional realist narrative acting to describe a very ‘ordinary framework’ of home and family in both continuity, and sharp juxtaposition, with Gregor’s bizarre transmutation into a giant insect.

These many ‘distortions’, in the terms of traditional conventions, preclude an easy

reading utilising their prescriptions to derive meaning from narrative, it is no longer an option to ignore anything outside these conventions as a 'misprint' or irrelevant. It is only through engaging with the multiplicities, contradictions and distortions that it may be possible to gain a better approximation of the lived human condition that these authors strive to present.

AN APERSPECTIVAL FUTURE FOR THE STUDY OF MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONS?

Painting as with contemporary narrative has not shown the same degree of fear of rules, and the possibilities and problems it may present, as management thinking. So how may painting aid as in our search for understanding?

For the artist the persuasiveness of the image was in its ability to convey the 'reality' it represented, and for artists in the perspectival world, this could only be achieved by rigidly and religiously following the rules of perspective. These rules governed them, and their ability to persuade the viewer/observer that the picture they were seeing/viewing did indeed realistically convey the sense, and essence, of the represented object. A persuasiveness that, as previously discussed, gained much of its legitimacy through a collective collusion, about the nature of the relationship between reality, its perspectively derived representation, and the interpretation of that representation utilising the rules of perspective. However for some, such rules were too constraining, and seem to further highlight the limitations of the ability of the artist to represent the real. As Cézanne claimed " I wished to copy nature but I could not. But I was satisfied when I discovered that the sun could not be reproduced but that it must be represented by something else ... " (Gebser, 1984, p. 478).

Thus art could be considered as reflecting a more general situation in society as a whole, with the turn of the last century, it could be argued, a paradigm shift was taking place in many fields of understanding. The theory of relativity could be considered as signalling the fall of the reigning paradigm of Newtonian physics, Euclidian geometry was being supplanted by Non-Euclidian geometry, etc, and thus as Damisch (1994, p. 28) argues, "the following conclusion is unavoidable: just as linear perspective provided descriptive conventions best suited to that representation of "truth" prevalent in the Renaissance, "it is widely agreed [I am quoting Edgerton] that Cubism and its derivative forms in modern art are in the same way the proper pictorial means for representing the 'truth' of the post-Einsteinian of paradigm.". A position emphasised by Panofsky , who stated that perspective construction "formalises a conception of space which, in spite of all changes, underlies all post medieval art up to, say, the *Demoiselles d' Avignon* by Picasso (1907), just as it underlies all post medieval physics up to Einstein's *Theory of Relativity* (1905)" (Panofsky, 1953, p. 5).

The dominance of perspectival understanding conditions the manner in which we view ourselves and the world – this is no less true for the study of management and organisations, as it is for art. Who, it would seem, perhaps because of its desire to be seen

as a 'legitimate' academic discipline, proceeded down its route of prescription, measurement, quantification and yet more measurement, seemingly oblivious to these threads of discontent. Taylor's pronouncements of how people were to be managed were tantamount to prescriptions for effective practice, and that the study of jobs and organisations was a 'true science'. Thus, he suggested it was possible to rationalise all activities in organisations, in such a way as to provide optimal levels of performance, and consequently was at the birth, if not one of the midwives, of this trend to squeeze the space, and the freedom it represents, from organisations. Such a view might be reminiscent of societal trends away from freedom – this was after all the predominant view of the world at the time, albeit it one that, as has just been suggested was on the cusp of change. The emergence of management during the period when the value of the control and quantification was at its zenith may have had an implicit, and apparently lasting influence on its development. As Hauser suggests "the unification of space and the unified standards of proportion [in Renaissance art] ... are the creations of the same spirit which makes its way in the organisation of labour... the credit system and double entry book keeping" (Hauser, 1951, p.277). A spirit, whose influence has apparently increased in the study of management while it has waned in these other fields of understanding. Yet, for us, students of management nearly a century later we now return to this cusp. We are now embroiled in a similar myriad of questions and debates regarding the effectiveness of our understanding, our tools, and our techniques, in the elaboration of management and organisation studies.

We can recall in painting, Cézanne identified the inadequacies of perspective and its restrictive rules, claiming, "I wished to copy nature but I could not..." (Gebser, 1984, p.478), his solution was to experiment with colour in such a way as to reveal the depth and richness of the juxtaposed relationships. Picasso likewise felt constrained by perspective and was inspired by Cézanne's courage, to experiment and explore new ways of developing art. He established a form, which combined elements seen from many different angles, abandoning the traditional laws of perspective where natural objects are seized from a single angle. His painting '*The Demoiselles d' Avignon*' (1907) marked a threshold in the development of painting. Picasso was in a sense seeking to persuade the observer of the need to go *beyond* making simple comparisons with the real – but requiring the observer to almost transport him/herself beyond the actuality of the painting and immerse themselves in its potential. And to do this requires not one interpretation but many and thus we can appreciate the moving of the viewing point of the object to multiple different positions, while at the same time dividing it into many fragments, allowed the presentation of an alternative representation of the reality. He had recognised the incompleteness of his early technique, and therefore strove to surpass its limitations. This technique explores space, it "functions on a level quite distinct from that implied by the propositions of Euclidian geometry: in [this] case, space is apprehended qualitatively intuitively; in the other [perspectival view] it is conceived as a rational essentially metrical system" (Damisch, 1994, p. 10) Thus he transcends the rule ridden perspectival approach, and its inherent characteristics, which although illuminating selected aspects of reality, also acts to repress and minimise other aspects of the total reality. It renders visible to sight, or perhaps *insight*, that which the reductionism of the lines and rules of perspective obscures and conceals.



Picasso's 1926 drawing of a woman (Figure 3) further illustrates some of these issues, it forces us to "take in at one glance the whole (wo)man, perceiving not just one possible aspect, but simultaneously, the front, the side, and the back. In sum, all the various aspects are present at once." (Gebser, 1984, pp. 24-25). It requires more than a passive receptivity, we must 'construct' an understanding - it demands "that we successively superimpose upon one another the various facets or aspects of the same thing, to produce finally ... the thing depicted in all its facets and thus in a new colourful plasticity" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 27). Picasso doesn't present an easy image, one that can be seamlessly interpreted through applying a universal set of rules. He requires us to engage with the representation, to construct an understanding. It is manifestly impossible to generate a single seamless 'reality', there is no final definitive truth, as the viewer is always aware of alternate planes, angles, shapes, and shadows that are not only not part of the current synthesis, and may be complimentary, seemingly irrelevant, or often contradictory, but can not be ignored. This inherent contradictory nature is clearly demonstrated in other works from Picasso such as *Guitar*, *Wineglass*, *Bottle of Vieux Marc* (1913) and *The Cup of Coffee* (1913) where the juxtaposition of signifiers does not "represent an attempt to synthesise different 'views' ... into a synthetic whole, rather the signifiers remain in the opposition" (Poggi, 1988, p. 316). Complexity and contradictions are manifest in his use of multiple planar overlays where a contiguous group of planes may serve to both indicate a given spatial recession, while elsewhere contradicting that recession. While the use of over-determination in which a single line or area performs multiple roles in representation serves to bring to the works the variable multiple perceptions prevalent in life.

Thus Picasso throws down a challenge to the seductiveness of 'ease of

understanding', he makes transparent the partial nature of any representation, forcing the recognition that each viewing will be different. Through inscribing multiple “paradigms in a paradoxical play of identity and difference, Picasso demonstrated that the material literalness of the ‘object’ itself was constituted within a system of oppositions” (Poggi, 1988, p. 320). He opens understanding to the play of paradox, conflicting interpretations and the collision of multiple cultural codes. Shows that for every aspect an individual interpretation clarifies, others will be hidden, obscured or distorted. He brings to the fore both the lucidity and contradictory essence of real life, and urges us to recognise and embrace this uncertainty.

Inspired by Picasso and the other Cubists, Boccioni as well as capturing this fragmentation, uncertainty and contradiction further challenges the delimiting, delineating and objectifying tendencies of perspectival perception. Not for him the artificial divorcing of object from subject, and the synthetically circumscribed boundaries derived from the process of objectifying and spatialisation. In his *The Street Penetrates the House* (1911, Figure 4) he manages to depict the interpenetrative nature of life, to subvert the conventional contrived separation of subject, object and environment, and reveal their contiguity and intercurrency. “Buildings are open forms”, he “graphically depicts the penetration of noise into someone from the house ... the material world penetrates her body as sounds and images penetrate her consciousness” (Kern, 1983, p. 197)



As with the earlier description of new forms of narrative, previous

representational techniques become part of, and add to the value, concept and heterogeneity of a perspective. An occurrence clearly manifest in the effect of Braque's incorporation of a *trompe l'oeil* nail in *Pitcher and Violin* (1910) or Picasso's introduction of a piece of oilcloth, decorated with a realist perspectival depiction of interwoven caning, in *Still Life with Chair-Caning* (1912) to help assert the inherent multiplicity.

Our purpose in drawing our reader's attention to the experience of painting is to reveal commonality. The impetus for this paper is to expose and guard against increasing trends of measuring or illuminating only those aspects of organisational activities, which are formal or rule based. Management research has 'swooped' into organisations with promises of understanding – producing seamless representations, based on the rules of the current management fad or fashion. The persuasiveness of these representations being based on a collusion between the researcher and their self-referential discourse. Accordingly, the tools and techniques employed, the known and the unknown, remain constant and organisational practice remains partial. A partiality that too often leads to the inevitable collapse and disappointment.

Organisations are seen too frequently as 'idealised' entities – with rational beings, with clear structures, and clear relationships. Organisations are idealised as measurable, rule governed, action-oriented sets of activities – but what are they really?

CONTRADICTIONS, INCONSISTENCIES, AND HETEROGENEITY

In our introduction we berated organisational understanding for its unthinking seduction by, and reliance on, the easy understandings obtainable through a rule informed interpretation of organisational performance. This blinkered commitment has led to a disjunction of much management understanding from the values espoused in other fields that have moved on from similar rule based simplistic perceptions. One major problem identified was the tendency for rule based interpretation to discount, ignore, or deem irrelevant anything encountered that does not fit easily within its tenets. An ignorance and dismissiveness that far too often, appears to return to haunt organisations.

In our exploration of the values of other contemporary cultural understandings we identified a very different attitude to the contradictory, distorted and ambiguous nature of much of the modern world. Perhaps it is time to learn from art and literature's desire to explore our multiple aspects and perceptions, and recognise management as a connected, related set of activities. It is suggested that management research need not continue to follow a set of rules analogous to those that led painting to compliance with the strictures of perspective, or narrative to its earlier conventions of realism. Rules which serve to obscure much of reality they do not necessarily guide action – they might in fact eclipse our possible levels of understanding.

Through this paper we hope to convey our concern for the need to engage with wholeness, in a way that is not restricted, or circumscribed to these prescriptive

approaches. A view that does not discount the undoubted contributions to management of alternative positions, and is thus prepared to explore new fields, that may stimulate fresh insights, which take account of the depth and richness of the actions which constitutes our present understanding of organisations. One, which does not originate with perspectives, modernism and comparisons to this particular view of the world - but which strives to take bold new steps. However it is not suggested that existing frameworks and understandings be discarded, but as with art and literature, are incorporated and developed for they are an integral part of generating the diversity, heterogeneity and contradictions that serve to stimulate greater understanding.

To take such a step is not new – we can appreciate that a similar dilemma confronted renaissance man (and woman) who might well have thought of themselves at that time to be the epitome of sophistication, and who were conditioned to this perspectival world. A world that was eventually revolutionised by among others Cézanne, Picasso and Kafka. However it is necessary to recognise many people at that time did not appreciate the significance of their rejections of these rules. Constrained by a perspectival mindset and without the conceptual tools to grasp these new conceptualisations, many people thought these artists just could not paint very well, or that this new writing was gibberish!! Our own tentative, and partial attempts to embrace these concepts bring home for us the difficulty of this leap, but again we draw further inspiration from these other fields that have succeeded despite much initial scepticism. It is recognised that this form of understanding may not appear to correlate with many ‘common sense’ observations, and is likely to arouse the same disdain, particularly from the general public, as did Einstein’s challenging of the ‘obviously observable’ effects of Newtonian physics, or as in the difficulties involved in understanding Cubism, which still remain a source of humour ninety years later.

We, in management studies, are at this same point – we are aware of our dissatisfaction and this paper, might be for some little more than a target for a similar scathing reply – ‘*they do not appreciate this or they can’t paint right, this doesn’t make sense ...*’ It may be that our existing tools/techniques/methods are indeed sufficient, but our perceptions are at present still conditioned by our logocentric dominant logic. At this time it is not possible to grasp the significance of this call, a point of which, we as authors are all too aware, and hope that this paper may at least be persuasive as to the potential of this exciting and enjoyable field of enquiry.

For us, the incentive for these new explorations - What if the nature of reality itself is, logically inconsistent or contradictory?

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