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Title: Evolving Management Ideas

Year: 2019

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

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Please cite the original version:

Seeck, H., & Lamberg, J.-A. (2019). Evolving Management Ideas. In A. Sturdy, S. Heusinkveld, T. Reay, & D. Strang (Eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Management Ideas (pp. 286-302). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198794219.013.1

Abstract

This chapter reviews the different conceptualizations of ‘the’ historical development of management ideas. It focuses on three approaches to the evolution of research on management ideas: (1) mainstream, (2) embedded, and (3) critical alternatives. The mainstream is the most dominant approach, both in research and in textbooks of management, while the embedded approach is increasingly popular among institutionally oriented researchers. A key suggestion is that it is also important to find and follow less researched avenues in the evolution of management ideas, such as the critical alternatives approach, drawing on forgotten and marginalized discourses. The authors explicate limitations and research opportunities emerging from the three approaches and seek to motivate researchers to look for new research directions in the study of management ideas.

Keywords

management ideas, alternative histories, critical perspectives, organization, management discourse

CHAPTER 15

EVOLVING MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Hannele Seeck and Juha-Antti Lamberg

Introduction

Recent studies of management history (e.g. Djelic, 2016) have increasingly criticized 'the' history of management as offering a limited, mono-cultural, and linear view of how management emerges and evolves. The same genre of research has called for a broader and more engaged understanding of management history to foster innovative thinking in our field. As Cummings and Bridgman recently observed:

> Management's origins are almost always outlined in 'chapter 2' after an introductory chapter. This forms a basis upon which management's more recent ideas are presented in the chapters that follow. They are presented as the foundations upon which the subject has been built and responded to. (2016: 252)

Developing a better understanding of how to view 'the' evolution of management ideas and their possibilities and limitations is important for various reasons. First, management ideas easily work as powerful frames for how we interpret not only the evolution of management thinking, but also management itself as a profession and a practice. Second, 'the' evolution of management, as both a historical and a discursive phenomenon, has attracted a very high number of research studies over the decades, and accounts can generally be found in all textbooks on management and

organization. To date we lack, however, a comprehensive overview of different approaches to the evolution of management ideas.

In the light of these motivations, we review three main approaches to the evolution of management ideas, their typical characteristics, as well as their possibilities and limitations. We first discuss a number of influential mainstream approaches such as the pendulum, performance gap, and fashion perspectives, which primarily focus on the 'winners' in terms of management models and fashions, thereby seeing these ideas as more or less universal models of management. Then we move on to review some approaches which draw on a more embedded perspective to understanding management idea evolution. Finally, we identify some less researched avenues to evolving management ideas, such as the critical alternatives approach(es) which focuses mainly on forgotten and marginalized discourses. These latter two enable us to reveal some underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions of the dominant approaches (see also O'Mahoney in this volume). Table 15.1 summarizes the three approaches that are the focus of our chapter.

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Historical accounts that focused on the pre-industrial era consider management as a practice that has been very similar throughout different time periods (Wren, 2005). Indeed, the quest for efficiency (e.g. Rost et al., 2010; Ruef, 2012), the handling of social tensions (Leeson, 2007), and a patriarchal approach to leadership (Bylund, 2010; Ruef and Harness, 2009) seem to be universal themes in the theory and practice of management. We explicate limitations and research opportunities emerging from the three main approaches, and raise the question of whether the study of management idea evolution should follow the historical turn in organization studies (e.g. Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Rowlinson et al., 2014) which would entail an increased emphasis

on the historically embedded nature of the practice of management (Vaara and Lamberg, 2016).

The Mainstream Approach: A Classic 'Chapter Two' Approach to the Evolution of Management

The mainstream approach generally includes more conventional perspectives on the evolution of management as both a historical and a discursive phenomenon, and has attracted a very high number of research studies over the last decades. These perspectives are characterized by a research focus on the emergence and prevalence of management ideas across time and geographical locations, and generally draw on realistic onto-epistemology and assumptions about universal ideals of management (see also O'Mahoney in this volume). Whilst there are differing established categorizations of how management ideas have evolved in the capitalistic era, these all share an underlying assumption of management as a powerful mode of thought in the modern world, which is associated with economic growth and a dominant American influence (Shenhav, 2002 [1999]). There is also a consensus that the roots of most Western twentieth-century management ideas lie in the USA (Barley and Kunda, 1992; Wren, 2005). In a classical reading, 'the' evolution of management ideas of the twentieth century is often described in the following way: scientific management emerged in the USA between 1900 and 1923, human relations between 1923 and 1955, systems rationalism between 1955 and 1980, and organizational culture from 1980 onwards (Abrahamson, 1997; Barley and Kunda, 1992; Guillén, 1994; Kunda and Ailon-Souday, 2005; Wren, 2005). The narrative follows, to varying

degrees, the adoption and translation of each of these models of management in different Western countries in successive decades.

As suggested, the mainstream approach to the study of management ideas evolution is not a monolithic approach but comprises different perspectives such as (1) the pendulum perspective, (2) the performance-gap thesis, (3) the 'old wine in new bottles' view, and (4) the fashion perspective. First, in their well-known study, Barley and Kunda (1992) draw on a *pendulum perspective*, thereby seeing the evolution of management ideas as an alternation between the ideologies of normative and of rational control. In particular, they suggest that the management ideas related to industrial betterment, human relations, and organizational culture have been based on normative forms of control, whereas scientific management and systems rationalism have their premises in rational forms of control. Whereas the locus of normative control is in shared values and moral engagement, the principles of rational control suggest that productivity is a result of carefully defined methods and procedures (Barley and Kunda, 1992: 384). According to Barley and Kunda's pendulum thesis, these alternating surges of rational and normative control relate to economic long waves—rational surges during long-wave expansions and normative surges during long-wave contractions. However, whereas the pendulum perspective explains the emergence of management rhetorics, Barley and Kunda's (1992) classic work does not explain the post-emergence prevalence of rational and normative rhetorics (Abrahamson, 1997) or how and why one rational or normative rhetoric may differ from another (Bodrožić and Adler, 2018).

Second, Abrahamson (1997) complements this perspective by establishing that, while long waves do explain the emergence of rational and normative waves, their post-emergence prevalence is explained by the *performance-gap thesis*: the popularity

of a management rhetoric depends on how well it can respond to the management problems typical of a time, i.e. how they are considered to narrow the gap between goals and actual performance (Abrahamson, 1997: 491–3). Relatedly, Abrahamson and Fairchild (1999: 714–15) also conducted a theory-development case study on the quality circle management idea and found evidence that during the upsurge of an idea management thinking can be depicted as 'superstitious learning' (Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999: 735–6). This enables 'the dissemination of the belief that specific management techniques are rational and progressive' (Nijholt and Benders, 2007: 648). Bodrožić and Adler (2018) propose that changes in the content of models of management can be explained by linking the emergence of new models to specific technological revolutions. Each management model, they argue, emerges through a primary cycle that generates a new model and renders the old one obsolete, followed by a secondary cycle that generates another model mitigating the dysfunctions of the one generated by the primary cycle (Bodrožić and Adler, 2018: 85). Drawing on this view, David and Strang (2006) show how fashionable management ideas can actually return to their technical roots once the hype they generate is over, thereby reversing the 'classic' logic of management evolution according to which hype is followed by the decline or abandonment of a management idea.

Third, authors such as Jacques (1996; see also Guillén, 1994a; Kieser, 1997; Spell, 2001) argue that there is little difference between the contents of successively adopted management ideas. From this perspective, 'new' management ideas are, so to speak, *old wine in new bottles*. This allows putting the previous two views into perspective given that one may find rather little difference between the consecutive ideas themselves. Fourth, the *fashion perspective* has generated a wealth of writing and studies over past decades. Management fashions are often defined as 'providing

efficient means to important ends and new as well as improved relative to older management techniques' (Abrahamson, 1996: 255). Fashions need to be perceived as rational and functional, yet innovative (Carson et al., 2000; Huczynski, 1993; Letscher, 1994). Management fashions are generally described as *cyclical*, i.e. they progress through a set of distinct stages. Abrahamson (1996: 264; see also Clark, 2004: 300; Gill and Whittle, 1993: 281) identifies a fashion-setting process consisting of creation, dissemination, acceptance, disenchantment, and decline or abandonment of an idea. Clark (2004) finds multiple shortcomings in the cycles approach, such as the extensive use of citation analysis and a focus on the dissemination stage of the fashion cycle to the relative neglect of the creation, selection, and processing stages (see also Heusinkveld et al., 2013).

In relation to the fashion perspective, some theorists assume that new ideas do not build on previous ones and consider this as an important driver for transience in management thinking (e.g. Gill and Whittle, 1993). Other studies have examined how recurrent management ideas cumulatively build on one another (Clark, 2004: 298; Spell, 1999, 2001), and thus that there is 'a gradual and directional, rather than a punctuated and random, accretion in business knowledge' (Clark, 2004: 298; see also Abrahamson and Eisenman, 2008). Heusinkveld and Benders (2012: 121) point out that there is no uniform pattern to the long-term impact of fashionable ideas on organizations. More recently, researchers have increasingly examined how management discourse and organizational practices relate to management ideas and how fashions may coevolve (Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999; David and Strang, 2006; Heusinkveld and Benders, 2012; Nijholt and Benders, 2007; Strang et al., 2014).

The classic 'chapter two' reading of how management ideas have evolved is not without its complexities, which are generally recognized as hampering our understanding of this evolution. For example, there is ambiguity in the conceptualization and functioning of management ideas. Indeed, some theorists argue that management ideas function as 'rationalized myths' (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) with a predominantly ceremonial or rhetorical function (Kieser, 1997). Others have argued that difficulties in our understanding of management idea evolution stem from an idea's 'linguistic ambiguity' (Nicolai and Dautwiz, 2010), 'interpretative viability' (Benders and Van Veen, 2001), or the extent to which they are 'ambiguous and vague' (Clark, 2004; Giroux, 2006; Kieser, 1997). Finally, the evolution of management ideas has not ended. Kunda and Ailon-Souday (2005) posit that since the beginning of the 1990s a new management idea, market rationalism, has emerged in the USA, based on the idea that markets have become the central location in which a firm's performance is assessed.

The mainstream approach to the evolution of research on management ideas currently dominates studies on the conceptual histories of these ideas. However, it pays little attention to 'deviations' stemming from different historical and cultural contexts in which these ideas become embedded. Moreover, the major management ideas, especially (scientific management, human relations, etc.), are so ubiquitous that they easily come to work as powerful frames for how we interpret not only the evolution of management thinking, but also management itself, a given which hampers discussions of the limits of these established frames. At the end of this chapter, in discussing the critical alternatives approach, we present some cases which may be seen as historical alternatives to the dominant historiographical accounts of

management thinking, but which simultaneously demonstrate the powerful nature of existing paradigms.

The Embedded Approach: Management Ideas Embedded in Contexts

The embedded approach is about understanding and analysing the evolving organizational and institutional adaptations and translations of management ideas within and between specific cultural and organizational contexts. Indeed, a major factor rendering the mainstream approach complex and problematic is the fact that the unique elements of different societies and how they relate to each other may induce considerable variation in the evolution of management ideas (Frenkel, 2008; Merkle, 1980). Research has tracked these developments in, for instance, the UK, France, Germany (Kipping, 1997; Merkle, 1980), Japan (Warner, 1994), Israel (Frenkel, 2005), Finland (Seeck, 2008; Seeck and Laakso, 2010a, 2010b), and Turkey (Üsdiken and Wasti, 2009). Findings show that there is no set template for patterns in the evolution of management ideas; rather, local conditions generate 'tailor-made' solutions (Guillén, 1994; Phillips and Oswick, 2012; Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008), which become widely shared and eventually taken for granted in their own locality (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996).

Theorists stress that even the best-known management ideas may follow different patterns of evolution (e.g. Guillén, 1994a) given that they are embedded in contexts. Management ideas manifest in different ways, in the form of different ideological and technical 'solutions' (Guillén, 1994a, 7; see also Bodrožić and Adler, 2018). Drawing on substantial comparative data from the USA, the UK, Spain, and Germany, Guillén

(1994a) shows that an idea's evolution in a society is related to the joint effect of (1) organizational problems and (2) institutional factors. In his study, Guillén (1994a) found different types of macro-level *organizational problems* associated with the introduction of management ideas. These include changes in the structure of the economy such as the bureaucratization of businesses, the separation of management and ownership, or companies growing and becoming increasingly complex. Another type of problem relates to international forces such as economic competition, and war or threat of war. The third type encompasses worker actions that somehow challenge the authority of management, such as strikes or sabotage (Guillén, 1994a). Guillén's (1994a) study showed that not all these problem types were present in all the countries (USA, Germany, Spain, and UK), and that different combinations existed in different countries.

In addition, a host of *institutional factors* have influenced how the adoption of specific organizational solutions has evolved in different countries, for example the mentality of the business elite, the role of the state in the dissemination of management ideas, the positions of professional groups and experts supporting an idea, as well as the response of employees to the implementation of the idea, the regulatory activities of the state, the position of the state in the supranational system, and the status of labour unions in a society (Guillén, 1994a). However, the focus here is on adoption versus rejection of a management idea in a particular context, and to a lesser extent on the detailed changes of meaning these models undergo when moving from one social context to another (Frenkel, 2005).

One may argue that the embedded approach often draws on different theoretical perspectives and concepts within neo-institutional theory, such as (1) Scandinavian institutionalism (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996, 2005), or (2) institutional work

(Perkmann and Spicer, 2008). The translation perspective, drawing on Scandinavian institutionalism, posits that the adoption and evolution of management ideas and practices is shaped by processes of translation and interpretation into a local context (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996, 2005). Since the new location and institutional environment are unlike those within which the idea originated, ideas are reinterpreted as they are adopted and put into practice in the new setting (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996, 2005; Morris and Lancaster, 2006), resulting in the occurrence of local versions and variations of the idea in question (Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008). This process is also known as glocalization (Czarniawska, 2008: 93). The glocalization perspective emphasizes how management ideas, and the wider meanings or perceptions of the problems conceived within these ideas, are not adopted as such, or do not evolve in a linear manner. Some ideas may be considerably modified along the way, or even rejected, while those that are adopted may receive social, cultural, and political meanings and attributes that were not attached to them in their country of origin (Frenkel, 2005). Management ideas thus also change as they evolve.

Another theory drawn upon in studying the institutionalization of management ideas is that of institutional work, which is defined as 'the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions' (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006: 215). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) describe the cultural, political, and technical forms of institutional work at play in this. In line with this, Perkmann and Spicer (2008) examined the conditions under which transitory management fashions become more permanently diffused and institutionalized, and found that it is the political, technical, and cultural work of various actors that constitutes the institutionalization of a management fashion.

Perkmann and Spicer (2008) argue that institutionalization is stronger if (1) any one type of institutional activity builds on the results of the previous activity, and if (2) multiple actors are involved (see also Guillén, 1994a). This is not necessarily a systematic process, but rather a result of consultants, gurus, business media, business schools, and others independently carrying out different types of institutional work that ultimately reinforce each other (Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999; Perkmann and Spicer, 2008).

One example of how management ideas become embedded is the role of religion, which is considered a significant institutional variable in shaping the evolution of management ideas. For example, the religious mentality of the business elite has impacted the adoption and rejection of models of management in many countries (Guillén, 1994a, 1994b), and ultimately shaped the evolution of management ideas. Guillén (1994b: 79) sees Confucianism and Buddhism as fostering a view of the firm as a community, while Christianity values individual efforts. Protestantism favours instrumental approaches, whereas Catholicism prefers communality and self-actualization (Guillén, 1994a, 1994b). In Germany, for instance, Protestant management intellectuals have been in favour of scientific management, while Catholics have preferred the human relations school. In Spain, Catholic theoreticians have played a decisive role in spreading the ideas of the human relations school (Gorski, 2003; Guillén, 1994b). There is also evidence on a more general level that, in Europe, ascetic Protestantism, particularly Calvinism, has led to the emergence of more rationally governed societies than in predominantly Catholic countries (Gorski, 2003; Guillén, 1994a, 1994b; Seeck and Kuokkanen, 2010).

In considering Christianity as an ideological and philosophical underpinning of management thinking across historical periods, it is also important to recognize that

not all countries and cultures share the same value base when it comes to management evolution. Asian countries and management ideas (Chen, 2002), for example, build on collectivism and a longer-term view of how to manage organizations (Michailova and Hutchings, 2006), making some aspects of management thinking considerably different from that of the USA and Western Europe (Chen, 2004). While the production of management ideas is increasingly global (Meyer et al., 1997) and Asian countries have successfully adopted ideas from scientific management and other management models (e.g. Tsutsui, 2001), these models may also be challenged by these alternative ways of thinking (see also Parker in this volume).

The embedded approach examines the travel of management ideas across time and into different geographical locations and emphasizes the value of sensitivity to cultural and organizational differences. However, the embedded approach also concentrates mainly on examining the evolution and adoption of mainstream management ideas, thereby ignoring forgotten management ideas. There is a need to consider the historical epistemology of management history (cf. Suddaby et al., 2014), which calls for explicit consideration of the role played by the particularistic and local nature of management, the complex causalities in the evolution of management ideas, and the motivations both of their past creators and of the present framing of these processes of creation. The historical epistemology of management history may help us to reconsider the nature and structure of present ideas on management and to understand the historically embedded nature of both management ideas and the practice of management across time and place.

The Critical Alternatives Approach to the Evolution of Management Ideas

The critical approach entails consideration of forgotten management ideas across time and geographical location. Overall, this approach contributes to a better understanding of both limitations and strengths of current conceptualizations of management idea evolution by identifying practices and ideas that could not be predicted by current mainstream frameworks. As the preceding pages indicate, the dominant discourse in research on management ideas focuses primarily on how, since the Second World War, management doctrines have been imported from the USA, which is generally considered a 'reference country' for many others (Üsdiken, 2004). As a result, 'chapter two' texts on 'the' evolution of management have predominantly focused on ideas and practices in the USA, often without problematizing this focus (cf. Üsdiken and Çetin, 2010). There has been discussion of Americanization in the context of management ideas (Alvarez, 1998; Djelic and Amdam, 2007; Frenkel, 2008), and of business schools (Amdam, 1996; Juusola et al., 2015; Tiratsoo, 2004). For example, Frenkel and Shenhav (2006) offer a postcolonial reading of management and organization studies, showing how colonial practices were the forerunners of processes now associated with Americanization, and followed a similar logic (Frenkel and Shenhav, 2003). Frenkel (2008), in turn, shows the importance of translation and of theorizing as ways in which geo-political domination is reproduced (see also Djelic in this volume). Although many, in particular American, management models can be very pervasive in the way they are diffused into different countries in a rather similar manner and order, the individual characteristics and institutional circumstances of

each country still affect the manner and timing of idea acceptance (Djelic and Amdam, 2007).

Much less discussed is the idiographic, historically specific nature of American-based management models. Some scholars have theorized how and why all models are to some extent hybrids (Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006; Guillén, 1994b), combining elements and influences from several sources and cultural orientations. Such hybrids are especially prevalent at the firm level, where organizational actors seldom use management models in a 'pure' form (Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008). Rather, models and fashions are often co-produced and co-consumed (Heusinkveld et al., 2011; Heusinkveld and Benders, 2012), that is, firms use models and ideas for their own purposes, driven by organizational goals, politics, and traditions (Levinthal and March, 1994; Sturdy, 2004). It is possible to recognize these firm-specific practices post hoc as belonging to specific paradigms, but the use of pure forms of management model is more the exception than the rule simply because organizational needs are firm- and context-specific.

For example, Rose (1999) has written about the evolution of different management ideas in the twentieth century, and how these have sought to shape the subjectivity of employees. This work shows how the psychologization of working life, and the ideas of the human relations school in particular, have made work an experiential phenomenon that shapes the subject. Shenhav (1995, 2002 [1999]) meanwhile shows how management experts turned rationality into an ideology by during the twentieth century, and how managers used this ideology to establish their power and legitimacy. Shenhav (2002 [1999]) suggests that ideological parameters arising from efforts to consolidate and legitimize management are implicit in much of management theory. Thus, evolving management ideas need also to be viewed as an

evolution of the legitimization and justification of different management styles and management functions per se.

Bendix argues that 'all ideologies of management have in common an effort to provide a favourable exercise of authority interpretation' (Bendix, 1956: 11; see also Bendix, 1959). He stresses the need to view managerial ideology as an attempt to rationalize and legitimate relations of obedience and command in companies and the current structure of authority in organizations. Thus, management ideas as managerial ideologies are regarded as emerging primarily in order to justify and maintain the authority of managers, not merely in order to justify a specific set of 'neutral' techniques (Frenkel, 2005; Shenhav, 1995, 2002 [1999]). The legitimization of managerial authority can take place through the use of techniques that allow managers to effectively and efficiently fulfil organizational goals.

American-based management models are also specific and historically embedded. The USA has been the leading economic force since the Second World War. This is reflected in the dominance of its business schools, management models, and consulting companies (see Djelic in this volume). However, 60 years is a relatively short period in global history, especially as this US dominance continues not to affect all parts of the world. But what if US business schools and thinkers had never made any significant innovations in management? Such questions lead us to consider alternative dominant management models, perhaps fundamentally or partially different from the present one (see also Parker and Salles-Djelic, both in this volume).

In essence, even small adjustments to the prevailing capitalist economic order may fundamentally shift the nature of management ideas (cf. Kipping et al., 2008; Üsdiken and Wasti, 2009). The assumption that a firm should be 'socially

responsible', for example, implicitly underpins most management models and doctrines, while in some cases social responsibility is the core of a management idea (Banerjee, 2008). For example, stakeholder management starts from an assumption that ethical behaviour is not only a question of values, but also enhances a firm's potential for capturing value. The ethical norms linked to US-based management models, however, are very specific. World history has seen (and probably will continue to see) ethical stances of various kinds, from Italian fascism to Juche in North Korea. Nazi Germany, in particular, was an alternative to Anglo-American ethical standards and important for management history due to its strong temporary influence on management ideas and education in Europe (see, e.g. Hayes, 2001 and Parker in this volume).

In the early stages of industrialization, Germany already represented a different tradition in management. Its political and military leaders, such as Moltke the Elder, had created far-reaching managerial models based on the integration of hierarchical organizational forms and the flexible delegation of power (Echevarria, 1996). Also, the industrial sector produced its own management thinkers. Buenstorf and Murmann (2005), for example, describe how Ernst Abbe, the manager of the Carl Zeiss Foundation, created his own management principles, which deviated considerably from those of Taylor and closely resemble much more modern ideas of the dynamic capabilities approach to strategic management (cf. Teece, 2007). So, when Hitler rose to power in 1933, Germany already had an independent tradition of management ideas and education with considerable impact in many parts of Europe. Hitler, however, changed the whole institution, generating and distributing management ideas and knowledge. In less than ten years most business professors, for example,

had either adopted Hitler's ideas on management and the economy or been replaced by loyal members of the Nazi Party (Mantel, 2010).

Because of Germany's defeat in the Second World War, we do not have a full picture regarding Nazi management ideas. However, the knowledge we do have of the ethical principles of the party suggests many similarities to scientific management, but with a bizarre angle resulting in repressed factory workers (Schoenbaum, 1997), the use of slaves in mass production (Homze, 2015), and an overall emphasis on economic efficiency and state control (Temin, 1991). The key message of and reason for raising such counterfactual questions is that the German system and management principles were not entirely different from Anglo-American management ideas. In fact they were very similar in most respects (Kipping, 1997), and only the presence of a few factors in the surrounding societal context was required to produce different kinds of management ideas originating from a common source (Taylorism and scientific management).

Overall, what we mean by critical and alternative in the context of management ideas is having an approach that challenges the prevalent assumptions of the Anglo-American business school canon. Seeing 'the' evolution of management ideas as a series of ahistorical processes—or assuming that similar processes will characterize all time periods—is naïve and has resulted in introverted and cyclical discussion of the paradigm changes and fine-grained differences between fashions and ideas.

Continuing Historical Questions and Avenues for Future Research

In this chapter, we have reviewed the current conceptualization of 'the' historical development of management ideas by focusing on three broad research approaches to the evolution of management ideas: the Mainstream, Embedded, and Critical Alternatives approach. Each of these has its possibilities and limitations for our understanding of management idea evolution. The mainstream approach is a powerful approach for studying the conceptual histories of management ideas. However, it is inclined to ignore historical and cultural deviations. The embedded approach is especially suitable for better understanding and analysing organizational and institutional adaptations and translations of management ideas. However, it often does not pay attention to local historical anomalies and the reasons for their marginalization. The critical alternatives approach highlights both the limitations and the strengths of current conceptualizations of management ideas by identifying practices and ideas that could not be predicted by current mainstream frameworks, but it risks becoming just a marginal search for anomalies and anecdotes in the context of business schools because it may undermine their legitimacy (see also Parker in this volume).

Our review of the three main approaches highlights some especially important avenues for the next generation of research on management ideas. The first concerns the meaningfulness of management ideas. Critical voices have already long argued that management ideas lack palpable material outcomes (Benders and Van Veen, 2001; Heusinkveld et al., 2011). The mainstream perspective would benefit from more longitudinal empirical research into management ideas: are these merely 'hypes' that have little bearing on the longer-term empirical reality of organizations? Do they evolve in and across organizations and across time? More research is needed in analysing links between organizational dynamics and the adoption of management

ideas. For instance, Sturdy and Fleming (2003) argue that there *is* a distinction between ideas and practices, but that this is overdrawn, and that 'talk can be a technique of implementation in its own right' (Sturdy and Fleming, 2003: 753). Sturdy (2004: 155) argues that existing frameworks tend either to idealize or to marginalize managerial rationality, which leads in practice to its neglect. Røvik (2011) succinctly asks why those studying management fashions should be looking at all for substantive or wide-ranging effects of popular management ideas whose transience and superficiality they have tended to stress. He suggests that the rather scarce conceptualization of how ideas affect organizations reflects the limitations of management ideas.

One potentially interesting way to approach this problem of the relevance of management ideas, of benefit to the embedded perspective in particular, would be to engage in empirical work by examining the causal strength of management ideas as catalysts for strategic and industrial change. That is, if management ideas have an impact and are 'real' (i.e. not just documentations of already existing managerial practices) their absence should change the organizations involved. This relates to debates about coevolution (see Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999; David and Strang, 2006; Nijholt and Benders, 2007). However, such thinking is still rare in the study of management ideas and therefore we encourage scholars to evaluate the meaning of these ideas from critical and even realist perspectives. Likewise, the 'strategy as practice' turn (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009) offers models and inspiration for studying the meaning of management ideas *in situ*—embedded and potentially used in organizations for different purposes. The practice turn also suggests that we need to be sensitive to actor-level perceptions and behavioural processes when facing, for

example, the use of another wave of new management ideas in executive education and strategy talk (Mantere and Vaara, 2008).

We have already emphasized that it is important to find and follow less researched avenues in the evolution of management ideas, such as the critical alternatives approach drawing on forgotten and marginalized discourses. Current research on fashions may be too much concentrated on the 'winners', and more emphasis on the 'losers' can generate far more insight into how ideas evolve (Clark, 2001; Swan, 2001). The critical alternatives approach, for example, enables us to illustrate some underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions of the dominant perspectives (as depicted in Table 15.1) and to look for new research directions in the study of management ideas.

We would suggest that historically embedded practices, and how ideas are seen by entrepreneurs and employees in different historical times and cultural contexts, should be studied through a multilevel analysis of micro, macro, and meso levels. The critical approach offers opportunities for studying, for example, contexts and management thinkers, which are not predicted by existing approaches and canons. Simultaneously, however, this carries a risk of anomalism and anachronism if done without historical sensitivity and, especially, without a motivation to engage in the development of theory on the evolution of management ideas.

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Table 15.1. Three approaches to the evolution of research on management ideas

	Typical characteristics	**Research focus**	**Underlying assumptions**	**Possibilities/limitations**	**Research examples**
Mainstream	Diffusion of management ideas and paradigms *across* time and geographical locations.	Research on the emergence and prevalence of management ideas.	Realistic onto-epistemology and assumptions about universal ideals of management.	A powerful approach for studying the conceptual histories of management ideas, but ignores historical and cultural deviations.	Barley and Kunda, 1992; Abrahamson, 1997; Kunda and Ailon-Souday, 2005.
Embedded	Diffusion and travel of management ideas and paradigms across time and *in* different	Adoption and translation of management ideas into specific cultural and	Often realistic onto-epistemology with sensitivity to cultural and organizational differences.	Especially suitable approach for understanding and analysis of organizational and institutional adaptations and translations of management ideas.	Guillén, 1994a, 1994b; Warner, 1994; Seeck and Kuokkanen, 2010.

	geographical locations.	organizational contexts.			Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996; Morris and Lancaster, 2006; Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008.
Critical alternatives	Other and forgotten management ideas across time and geographical locations.	Tracing of historical anomalies and reasons for their marginalization.	Different onto-epistemological approaches, from realist to social constructionist and post-modernist.	Highlights both limitations and strengths of current conceptualizations of management ideas by identifying practices and ideas that could not be predicted by current mainstream frameworks. May appear to be	Kipping, 1997; Leeson, 2009; Mantel, 2010; Ruef and Harness, 2009.

a futile search for anomalies

and anecdotes.