
INTRODUCTION

Philip Hancock

Here you will find a collection of essays concerned with the understanding of corporate organization and its management. It has been written at what appears to be a time of almost unprecedented economic upheaval that will undoubtedly have significant consequences for such organizations and the people who work in and for them. As such, it might be fair to say that a collection such as this is already verging on irrelevancy, dealing primarily as it does with the organizational landscape that no longer exists. Well, possibly. Yet despite the turmoil that currently surrounds us, it seems unlikely that the changes we have seen in the world of work and its organization over the last 30 years or so will be easily reversed. The globalization of the marketplace, the expansion of information communication systems, and the expectations of an increasingly educated and demanding consumer body will all continue to place fresh demands on the corporate world to innovate, and expand its interests and operations. And while capitalism is undergoing one of its inevitable lurches into crisis, it cannot simply be viewed as the same beast that it was during its last period of major decline and recession. As Thrift (2005) has observed, capitalism is now a much more sophisticated system. It is one that has arrived at a state of almost self-consciousness, learning not only from its own innovations but also those ideas, and indeed criticisms, that are circulated about it, often turning them to its own advantage. It has succeeded in embedding itself deeper into our cultural psyches than ever before, providing not only the backdrop to practices of work and consumption but also to our leisure activities, our moments of familial togetherness, and even our most intimate experiences of each other and ourselves (cf. Tyler, 2004). As Thrift (2005: 1) himself expresses it: 'Capitalism has a kind of crazy vitality. It doesn't just line its pockets. It also appeals to gut feelings. It gets involved in all kinds of extravagant symbioses. It adds to the world as well as subtracts'.

Not that all diagnoses of the current condition of capitalism share quite such a breathless optimism. Hardt and Negri (2000), for instance, have argued that while capitalism has indeed achieved a new stage in its development this

must largely be understood in terms of its colonization of both global difference as well as personal values and individual aspirations. In particular, corporations are required increasingly to incorporate nearly every aspect of their employees' everyday lives into their operations in order to maximize 'creativity, free play and diversity in the corporate workplace' (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 153), as well as their own socio-cultural legitimacy. Another perspective on such developments is that of Boltanski and Chiapello (2005), who have pointed to the emergence, over the last 20 years or so, of what they describe as a new spirit of capitalism. This is a spirit which is concerned with the continued ideological legitimacy of capitalist economic and social relations, and places a priority on the cultural and moral engagement of employees in general, and managers in particular. Corporations engage employees not simply as units of labour, therefore, but as invaluable assets who must be encouraged to exercise initiative and creativity within a framework of flexibility, the promise of self-development, and a contribution to the idea of a common good.

Now none of these are, I would argue, developments that will depart the scene very quickly, whatever the character of the current market. They define contemporary capitalism today and will for a number of years to come. Yet, however one conceptualizes or theorizes the nature of capitalism and the quality of corporate life that extends from it, what is of particular interest to us here is to what extent has the study of corporate organizations shifted in order to engage this contemporary landscape? Certainly from the perspective of what one might term 'mainstream' textbooks on the subject, it would seem that the answer is hardly at all. Open any such text and what you will tend to find are chapters on topics such as structure, leadership, motivation and culture which, while often updated in terms of empirics and perhaps more topical case studies, could have been found in any similar textbook published over the last 30 years or so. This is not to suggest that there are no good textbooks in the field of organization theory available – far from it. Offerings from the likes of Clegg et al. (2008), Knights and Willmott (2006) and Hatch and Cunliffe (2006), amongst a number of others, do ask difficult questions of corporate organizations and often engage with highly novel aspects of their activities and practices. As textbooks they often remain restricted, however, by both the format expected of such books and the requirements of their readership, leaving little opportunity for the reader to encounter and engage with the ideas and experiences of the authors behind the writing.

The book you have in front of you is, as we hope you will notice, somewhat different to the usual textbook, however. First and foremost it isn't a textbook as such, not as one might understand it anyway. It contains few, if any, diagrams, thinkboxes, suggestions for further reading or indeed case studies or sample essay questions. Nor does it cover what one might term the usual suspects of organization theory as suggested above. Subjects such

as culture, power, leadership, and even motivation, are present of course, but just not as explicitly as one would encounter in a standard student textbook. Rather, they might live beneath the surfaces of the chapters you will encounter here, providing the background against which certain topics are discussed. For instance, motivation inevitably provides the context in which discussions of identity, aesthetics and a host of other topics take place. Alternatively, traditional subjects might surface quite explicitly in chapters such as those concerned with knowledge or technology, but be presented in a very particular and often personal manner.

In fact this is what really sets this book apart from the more established textbook genre in that it is a very personal book for each of the contributors. For not only do these chapters each discuss an area of contemporary corporate life that has been largely ignored or at best marginalized in most mainstream textbooks, they do it from the very particular perspective and interests of their author or authors. As such, what you won't find here are particularly standardized formats or claims to exhaustivity in the treatment of the material under consideration. Rather, what you are offered is a series of essays that will introduce you to topics that, in the view of the individual authors, characterize the experience of corporate organizational life today. Furthermore, these topics are addressed and delivered in line with what these authors consider to be their most pertinent and important features, and in terms of how they would discuss them with their own students. As the title of the book suggests, therefore, the aim of this collection is not simply to record the features of contemporary corporate life, but to promote an understanding of what characterizes the everyday experience of work in and around such corporations as they adapt to the changing face of capitalism.

Now, having made such an apparently strong claim for the value of the insights that the authors of this book can bring, it is perhaps somewhat incumbent on me to say something about the team of academics who produced this collection. Or, to put it more directly, just what, or indeed who, is the Warwick Organisation Theory Network? The authors collected together here either serve, or have served, as members of faculty at Warwick Business School (WBS), part of the University of Warwick, and are affiliated to the Warwick Organisation Theory Network (WOTNet). Formed in 2004, WOTNet aims to support and promote the critical, interdisciplinary and expansive study of organization amongst WBS faculty members through a range of events, publications and other activities. The Warwick Business School has a long and celebrated history at the forefront of developments in organization theory and related fields, and it is the ambition of WOTNet to continue this tradition. Its members are widely recognized as leading scholars in the various sub-fields of organization theory in terms of both their research and their contribution to teaching and scholarship. They have long-standing links to some of Europe's premier journals in the field, including

Organization Studies and *Organization*, as well more specialized publications such as *The International Journal of Work, Organisation and Emotion*.

The Warwick Organisation Theory Network is also centrally involved in the design and delivery of the WBS masters programme in Management and Organizational Analysis. Drawing on a range of social science disciplines, this is a programme that seeks to challenge managerial orthodoxies and contribute to a forward view of how organizations are evolving, and indeed pushing the ideas of organization and organizing beyond traditional boundaries towards ideas of organizing as a fundamental activity of social life. All of the topics covered by the chapters here have at one time or another, therefore, constituted part of the teaching curriculum of each of the authors. Similarly, the training and supervision of PhD students is also a core activity of the majority of members of WOTNet, ensuring that each of us remains tightly integrated into a culture of collaborative learning with our students, exploring new avenues and pushing boundaries in terms of what constitutes knowledge and understanding of organization.

So, having broadly outlined the ethos of the collection and the qualifications of the authors it is perhaps time to turn to a brief description of the contents of the book itself. In the first of the essays, Martin Corbett offers a discussion of technology and corporate life which offers a rethinking of the relationship between technology and the cultural and human dimensions of organizational activity. As he notes, while from the earliest days of the industrial revolution technology has represented a vital corporate resource, it has tended to be viewed as a distinct and quite discrete aspect of organizational life; one largely ignored by the field of organizational theory until around the mid-point of the twentieth century. Since then, however, technology has emerged as something of a contested terrain, viewed in terms of a rage of competing dualities such as human/non-human and, in terms of an ethical orientation to the questions it frequently poses, good/evil. In contrast to this, however, Corbett seeks to argue in favour of a more aesthetic conceptualization of technology, by which it is viewed not so much as a separate dimension of organizational life, but as integral to each and every aspect of it. Thus, utilizing the popular image of the cyborg he argues that human agency, organization and technology have become mutually indispensable to one another, a proposition that challenges us to rethink the vary basis of our humanness perhaps as much as it does the ways in which we think about the relationship of technology to the structuring of corporate working life.

Following on from Corbett's opening intervention, we have Chris Grey's reflections on what without doubt has become one of the corporate world's overriding operational priorities, that of speed. Opening with a nod to the ghosts of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and their observation regarding capitalism's insatiable need to constantly change and revolutionize itself, Grey situates the 'need for speed' at the heart of contemporary corporate

life. While, as noted above, the pursuit of speed has always been integral to the very nature of capitalist business, it is an operational quality which has taken on even greater significance with the rise of a culture of globalization, itself in part driven by the accelerating consequences of modern computer technologies. Despite what at first sight might appear to be the advantages such a prioritization of speed might entail for organizational competitiveness, however, for Grey a fixation on the celebration of speed at all costs is one that is not without its dangers. Inspired in part by the unlikely ideas of Luddism, he suggests that the way in which speed has become an end in itself is potentially destructive not only to the possibility of capitalism operating with at least some reference to the idea of the common good (see for instance some of the critiques levelled at the finance markets and their contribution to the recent economic crisis), but that it destabilizes the very fabric of people's everyday lives. In contrast then he turns his attentions to the possibilities offered by the increasingly popular 'slow movement' and how this might inform a revalorization of speed in order to serve the creation of a more just and human set of both social and organizational arrangements.

While the chapters by Corbett and Grey are clearly linked by a concern with technology, the following chapter by Philip Hancock shares another related concern, that of aestheticization. While Corbett refers to an aesthetics of technology and Grey, if albeit implicitly, to the subjective experience of acceleration and the particular aesthetic associated with it, Hancock's chapter presents the aesthetic as something which is in and of itself an increasingly significant corporate interest. Taking it to refer to knowledge acquired through one's pre-reflective and sensual exposure to the materiality of the world, what is presented in this essay is a critical reflection on the ways in which corporate organizations are increasingly managing their aesthetic dimension in order to secure competitive advantage. This process, which he terms organizational aestheticization, is illustrated through a discussion of a range of contemporary corporate practices. These range from the presentation of management as an art-like activity, through the stylization and landscaping of organizational environments, up to and including the manipulation of the bodies of employees in order to render them aesthetically congruent with the aims and aspirations of the employing corporation. And while open minded to the possible benefits such an interest in the aesthetic qualities of work and its organization might bring to both employers and employees, Hancock maintains a wary eye on the idea that the aesthetic can continue to thrive under the aegis of corporate rationality, reminding us that the line between liberation and colonization is often a rather narrow one.

The importance of architecture to corporate image building, an issue touched upon in Hancock's chapter, is expanded and refined by André Spicer in his following chapter on corporate space and its production and design. Noting the almost inevitable ubiquity of spatial relations to understanding corporate life,

for Spicer, the social construction and individual and collective experience of such spaces – ranging from the mundane environment of the office to the grandiosity of the corporate headquarters – play a central role in formation of identities, both of corporate actors themselves as well as those who occupy the spaces. Deploying a tripartite analytical framework that concentrates on the production of space through physical distance, patterns of understanding, and the materialization of control, he charts a path through the various spatial histories and landscapes of the corporate world from the factory floor, through the open plan office, to the supermarket checkout. In doing so he interrogates a series of questions such as how is corporate space produced, who serves to benefit from its design and management, and how and why do individuals frequently become attached to the corporate spaces they inhabit? In doing so, Spicer evokes an image of corporate organization which is both material and imagined, productive and produced; leaving us in little doubt that in order to understand the conceived and lived experience of corporate life, space is, and must remain, an integral contributor to that endeavour.

Charles Lamb, the nineteenth-century English essayist once commented that nothing troubled him more than time and space and yet nothing troubled him less ‘as I never think about them’. Despite the rather contradictory quality of this observation what is significant, however, is that he recognizes the inescapable relationship between the spatial and the temporal qualities of human existence. We are creatures that exist within both these dimensions, however much we might try to deny at least the latter of the two. Thus it may perhaps come as no surprise that following Spicer’s consideration of space and spatiality we next turn our attentions to the temporal and the relationship between time and an understanding of corporate life. In this essay, Karen Legge considers the relationship between objective time – namely that characterized by formal systems of calculation such as industrial ‘clock time’ – and its subjective counterpart which flows from our individual experiences and personal mental constructions of time; lacking the homogeneity and equivalency of its objective other. At the heart of Legge’s argument is a belief in the need to recognize time and its competing modes as a vital terrain of, to use her own words, ‘commodification, compression, control and colonization’, whereby corporate organization seeks to reconfigure subjective time in line with its own ‘objective’ imperatives. In order to resist this, both theoretically, and indeed practically, Legge evokes a range of far more dialectical orientations towards the temporal world such as the ‘timescape’, or ‘spiral time’, both of which emphasizes the interrelatedness of differing conceptions of time, resisting their easy assimilation into one variant or the other.

It is difficult these days not to encounter the proposition that we are, in one way or another, both living and working in an increasingly globalized environment. Indeed one of the most popular explanations of this process is that this is a consequence, taking us back to the previous two chapters, of the

compression of time and space brought about by the almost unlimited reach and speed of information communication technologies (Harvey, 1989). In the sixth of our essays, Glenn Morgan tackles this question of globalization and how it impacts on our understanding of contemporary corporate life. He commences by sketching out a conceptual framework within which contemporary processes of globalization are defined in relation to a series of increased interdependencies between social actors over a global scale. From this starting point Morgan is then able to offer a richly illustrated analysis of how people's everyday experiences of work and life directly reflect such processes. In particular, he explores the role played by global economic processes in the production of the conditions of everyday corporate life via, for instance, the restructuring of firms, processes and consumption as well as the ways in which it has created new global migrations of labour. In particular he considers how such migrations have created both new pressures and new opportunities in terms of the appearance of transnational communities who are increasingly central to global circulation of finance, contributing both to the criminal laundering of money on the one hand, and the support and welfare of the vulnerable members of the global community on the other; both representing a true challenge to how we conceive the nature and role of multinational organization.

While Morgan's essay is primarily concerned with the appearance of a form of globalized community born of a series of interdependencies, in the next essay Chris Land tackles the issue of community and its implications for corporate life head on. As he rightly acknowledges, corporate life increasingly extends well beyond the formal parameters of the workplace and nor should it always be reduced simply to the experience of the business organization. Nonetheless, as he explains, community has long had its associations with the realm of the corporate business organization. It has been posited, for instance, as the antithesis of such organizational forms, grounded as it is suggested they are in a far more instrumentalized set of social relations in comparison to the more substantive rationalities of traditional community. Yet despite this apparent tension with the idea of community, as Land observes, much organizational effort even today is concerned with attempting to reclaim the values of community associated with its apparent dissolution in the face of the mass industrialization and urbanization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries culminating in the contemporary organizational ideas of communities of practice and the marketing category of brand communities. Yet despite all this, Land continues to identify the ways in which the ideal of the ecommunity continues to provide a focus for those opposed to the influence of corporate ideology both within and external to the sphere of the formally constituted work organization.

While community continues, in Land's analysis, to represent a contested terrain, both conceptually and politically, it is clear that how one is orientated to the idea can have a notable impact on the sense of identity one constructs for oneself. And it is to the subject of identity that Nick Llewellyn turns his

attention to in the next of our essays. In what is an empirically rich piece of writing, Llewellyn explores some of the ways in which young people learn to occupy an identity position of worker even before they enter the corporate labour market. Explaining the evolution of identity as a profoundly social question, the essay locates identity and the question of its formation and regulation as a problem that sits at the heart of contemporary organization theory. This understanding is then relocated in the ways in which, through the discourse of transferable skills so beloved by the current UK government, young men and women are encouraged and resourced to constitute an identity for themselves as an employable worker from an increasingly young age. That is, within the transferable skills framework, young people are encouraged to view and represent even the most mundane of activities – ranging from playing sport to going on holiday – as the building blocks of a corporately oriented identity, evidence of perhaps yet a further incursion of corporate interests into the everyday lives of those increasingly subject to them.

Our penultimate chapter directs our attention to a theme touch upon not only in Land's essay via the theme of communities of practice, but in its own way in Llewellyn's reflection on identity. I refer here to Jacky Swan and Maxine Robertson's essay on knowledge and knowledge management. While critical of much of the hype that has surrounded the idea of knowledge as a vital corporate resource, at the heart of this essay is a realization that organizations are increasingly seeking to tap into or harness the knowledge of its employees as well as the formal and informal networks they inevitably belong to. Drawing on research into the biotechnology industry, a knowledge rich environment if ever there was one, Swan and Robertson explore the various mechanisms by which not only the organization attempts to exploit both professional as well as personal and friendship based networks in order to maximize access to and retention of knowledge based resources, but also how these so-called 'knowledge workers' are quite prepared to utilize their interpersonal relationships in order to achieve corporate objectives. What is particularly interesting, they conclude, is how many of the judgement calls made by employees in terms of who to cooperate with and trust in what is in fact a highly competitive environment often comes down, to return to Hancock's chapter, to aesthetic judgments based on intuition and gut feelings.

This leads us to the final essay of the collection, which is by Emma Surman and Andrew Sturdy. Here the theme resonates with the final observation of Swan and Robertson regarding the importance of non-rational judgements in the corporate sphere in that its topic is that of emotion. While much research has been conducted into the role emotion increasingly plays as a mediating agent between employees and customers, most notably in the service industries, the authors of this essay take a somewhat different perspective. Drawing on various studies of emotion within organizations and some of the author's own research, this essay explores managerial efforts to appropriate emotional

experiences with particular reference to what they term the emotional arena of *fun and friendliness*. Rather than focusing on the interface between the corporate organization and the consumer then, what is unpacked here is the ways in which managerial efforts have turned to the emotions generated within organizations and between colleagues. The incorporation of activities one might normally associate with life outside the workplace such as games, quizzes, dressing up, raffles, etc., are thus explored directly in relation to attempts to establish work as a 'fun' and 'friendly' place to be, distinct from the rational traditions of organization, in order to bolster employees' identification both with each other and, ultimately, with corporate agendas of enhanced productivity and quality of service. The study of emotionality, and more importantly the ways in which emotional attachment is engendered through the promotion of fun and friendliness within the workplace is, as with all the topics considered in this collection, presented as a vital element in our renewed attempts to understand contemporary corporate life.