Management development as a game of meaningless outcomes

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The last 10 years have witnessed a substantial increase in the volume of management training and development (MTD), with 45 per cent of companies now giving it a high priority (Storey *et al*, 1997). One of the key constituents of HR policy, MTD claims to promote new approaches to the management of people, in which attitudes and tacit knowledge are developed as a key source of competitive advantage in response to rapidly changing market conditions (IPD, 1997). Increasingly MTD is seen as an instrument of organisational change, used through the competency movement, Investors in People (IIP) standard and Management Charter initiatives as a way of linking people performance to the business strategy (Iles, 1993, Holmes and Joyce, 1993). It is a major growth industry; in the UK alone it was worth approximately £2 billion in 1994 with around 2,750 management consultancy and training firms competing for this market (Williams, 1996).

Willmott (1994) broadly classified this domain of management learning in terms of MTD, which is largely concerned with organisational activities to develop managerial competence, and management education, which is often funded by the state. Management education has become the preserve of higher education institutions, and tends to devote more time to examining the wider social responsibilities of managerial work than MTD.

The upsurge of activity and investment in both these arenas has generated a healthy debate in the academic community about the effectiveness, underpinning values and social impact of MTD. Williams, in a searing attack on the industry, describes the content of many MTD 'courses' as being based on 'fashionable pseudo-theory, therapy and quack remedies' and the methods used as relying on 'pretentious American pyscho-babble... highlighting the importance of positive stroking, huddling and "Zeus Culture"... with the occasional Zen or Eastern input.' (1996: 3). Mole (1996), in describing much of this type of activity as 'genre training', highlights the gap between social science research and training practice in MTD and calls for greater effort to be placed on resolving the 'considerable methodological problems in evaluating training effectiveness' (1996: 24). Indeed, a study from the International Institute of Management Development (IMD), in Lausanne, into current practice in assessing the impact of management development in international organisations found that 80 per cent of respondents were unable to quantify the impact of such alleged investment (Cairns, 1997).

Rainbird's (1994) analysis of 21 case study organisations supports these findings and identifies other concerns about the effectiveness of MTD activities, in particular the lack of integration between HRM and MTD. The study highlights four key reasons for this: the conflicting rationales of business and HR strategies; lack of line management expertise in HR planning; the organisation of the training function itself not being well integrated with broader personnel responsibilities; and, perhaps most importantly, the financial procedures used to account for MTD expenditure encourage a short-term perspective (1994: 87). Butcher *et al* (1997), in their study into the effectiveness of a number of public management development programmes, show that the sponsoring organisations provided very little long-term, post-programme monitoring of, or interest in, their managers, despite having invested

between £5,000 and nearly £9,000 on programmes of two to three-week duration. The critique from respected academics seems to grow in direct proportion to the investment in MTD.

Even within companies themselves, managers often demonstrate scepticism on the effectiveness of much MTD. Post-programme behaviour change is usually greeted with: 'He must have been on a training course; don't worry, he'll be back to normal in a few days' (see Ackers and Preston, 1997). Recent research from Cranfield shows that 40 per cent of managers in a survey population of 123 believed that money was wasted in many MTD activities (Atkinson and Meldrum, 1998).

So why the discrepancy? Why are organisations spending more money than ever on an activity which seems of questionable value? Willmott (1994) provides an extensive examination of the power and control issues inherent in the provision of management development and education in the UK. In recent years much MTD effort has been concentrated on the competency approach. This model has come to be seen as a critical bridge between organisational strategy and people development, enabling investment in MTD to be focused toward key organisational performance issues (Lee, 1996). However, for Willmott, this approach has tended to marginalise the 'personal and social competencies that are not readily standardised, measured or evaluated' and 'does little to develop the capacity to learn how to understand the complexities of management practice or to respond to new challenges.' (1994: 110). While management education has a greater opportunity to consider the wider social responsibilities of managers, it is caught within a number of debilitating institutional barriers. For example, the pressure for academics to specialise and the competition for career advancement has helped produce a disinterest or resistance among management academics to explore alternative approaches to management education (1994: 117).

Willmott's focus is mostly on the issues surrounding publicly-funded management education. This article will build on this body of work by investigating in more detail how power relations are enacted within the workplace through MTD to identify the sources of this contradiction of increasing investment for doubtful return. The traditional study of MTD has been through a systems-based contingency model of MTD (van der Krogt and Warmerdam, 1997). However, this approach, while acknowledging the importance of power as an organisational variable, fails to address it in any specific fashion (Burrell and Morgan 1979). The enactment of MTD is explicitly concerned with the exercise of power (Hopfl and Dawes, 1995; Coopey, 1995). Accordingly, in order to be able to deal with the political and relational aspects of MTD, this article will use an actor-orientated approach. According to van der Krogt and Warmerdam, (1997: 89):

> [MTD is a manifestation] of the continuous game that goes on in an organisation, in which different actors with different positions, interests and action theories, seek to influence and use the rules, facilities, systems and processes in and around the organisation in such a way as to achieve as favourable a result as possible for themselves.

MTD therefore becomes an organisational game that is used to further particular power relations. Using this game perspective, this article will identify some of the reasons why there is so much activity in MTD but so few meaningful outcomes. Attention will be given to exploring the influence of MTD professionals and the impact of the normative frameworks and institutionalised power relations embedded in this organisational game. The article also considers the value of, and opportunity for, different approaches to the enactment of MTD and concludes with irony that it is MTD itself which could be most effective in initiating change. However, to do this, those involved in the MTD industry will have to expose themselves as part of the problem.

BACKSTAGE ACTIVITY

MTD is central to strategic HRM policies of increasing employee commitment, the development of greater workforce flexibility, the raising of employee contribution *etc*. It is intended as a catalyst for change (Doyle, 1995) and therefore MTD professionals have been increasingly viewed as agents of change. The impact and outcomes of MTD will therefore be, in part, a reflection the competency of MTD professionals to make a difference and the extent to which they and other organisational actors are able to manage or allow such change.

So what sort of impact do they make? Work by Buchanan and Boddy (1992) into the 'public performance and backstage activity' of the change agent highlights the need for change agents to manage three parallel agendas (1992: 28):

- **Content agenda**: the substance of the change *eg* introducing teamworking, in which the change agent must have technical competence;
- **Control agenda**: planning, budgeting, resourcing *etc*; and
- **Process agenda**: implementation skills in terms of influencing, negotiation, political skills in managing resistance, building coalitions and the management of ritual and meaning.

More recent work by Pitt *et al* (1997) reveals the delicate political process of creating the agenda in the first place before any of the above is executed. The expertise of the change agent also lies in his or her ability to construct a consensus about which emergent issues are important before work on those agendas is started. While the behavioural repertoire required to manage the content and control agendas is relatively straightforward, the skills, self-knowledge, emotional resilience *etc* required for managing agenda creation and the process agenda itself should be viewed as considerable. Recent research by Atkinson and Meldrum (1998) into the quality of management development professionals, as perceived by line management, revealed a list of deficiencies, if viewed from a change management perspective. Line management was largely either ambivalent or negative about management development professionals in terms of their influence in the organisation, their ability to act as good role models, their ability to match needs to developmental activities and in terms of their strategic overview of the business. They also tended to be seen as administrative rather than consultative. This list would suggest that many line managers would perceive that MTD professionals are unlikely to be able to demonstrate the competencies needed to construct or manage a difficult process agenda. Baddeley and James (1987) provide a descriptive model of political behaviour classified according to the degree which individuals are able to 'read' organisational decision processes, personal agenda, power bases *etc* and the degree to which they are interested in psychological game-playing, a concern with oneself at one extreme or acting with integrity at the other. This produces four types of political behaviour:

- **Clever**: people who are interested in the locus of power; are unprincipled and inner goal-orientated; are able to manipulate situations so as to appear to never make mistakes; know how the formal and informal organisation works; can recognise and exploit weaknesses; and like games of winners and losers.
- **Wise**: people who have personal values and ethics; listen well and are aware of others' viewpoints; use coalition; know how the formal processes work; get support; and negotiate and strive for win-win situations.
- **Innocent**: people who tend to rely on authority; don't appreciate political purpose; only understand the content but not the process of procedures; believe that flavours of the month are here to stay; and believe in expert and position power.
- **Inept**: people who also do not recognise political purpose; are inept at making alliances and coalitions; try hard to be nice; not tuned into the grapevine; interpersonally unskilled; and see things as 'either/or'.

In terms of this model, the research from Atkinson and Meldrum (1998) reflects a perception from line management that would seem to locate much MTD activity in the last two 'unaware' categories and would therefore be unlikely to possess the necessary political process skills needed to initiate substantial change. Buchanan and Boddy (1992) suggest that change agents with low process skills are more likely to excel in 'low vulnerability' and 'low hassle' contexts. These contexts reflect incremental and peripheral organisational change. This observation is supported from research by Ezzamel *et al* in their sample of 27 companies, which showed that the 'integration of HRM and business strategy was the exception' (1996: 76) and, in Rainbird's study (1994: 87), that:

> Neither the integration of the training function into other policy areas, nor the integration of employees through their involvement in training programmes, has occurred to any great extent... This would suggest that the implementation of HRM has been piecemeal at best.

The high order skills required for managing the political agenda of change would have seemed to have pushed many MTD professionals, and therefore MTD, into the peripheral arena in which nothing substantial appears to happen.

However, within HR policies, the role of line management is key in the development of appropriate types of behaviour and much MTD activity has been devolved to the line over recent years. Does this improve the chance of meaningful MTD activity? Rainbird's findings reflect that line managers were often ill-equipped to take on these responsibilities. This has been supported in more recent work by McGovern *et al* (1997: 22) which has shown that insufficient institutional reinforcements, managerial short-termism and restructuring reduce the effectiveness of line managers in being able to give time and priority to softer HR activities:

> Managers understood both formally, via performance objectives, and informally, through the demands of their superiors, that their main priority was the hard stuff – the numbers... while the softer people management issues were of less significance.

Given this analysis, MTD professionals currently seem unlikely to be able to manage the demanding agendas of change and line managers are overtly encouraged to prioritise in favour of financial targets so that nothing much appears to happen. However, initial analysis indicates increasing levels of activity. How can this be accounted for? The management of organisational meaning is of particular significance here.

LEGITIMISING MTD

The importance of ritual and symbolism in organisational life is critical to the management of these meanings, of how what is taken for granted comes to be so (Johnson, 1990). The strong institutional legitimisation of MTD, through the use of organisational language and ritual, ongoing rule definition and other symbolic actions, all serve to maintain a shared meaning that something is happening. The arena of MTD is laden with organisational ritual; the annual appraisal to identify development needs, the creation of the training and development budget, the end-of-course 'happy sheets' *etc* all help to create the legitimacy of the MTD/HR role. The sanctioning of MTD investment by senior management and the appointment of MTD professionals imply a commitment to such activity. As Pfeffer (1981) points out, this symbolic action can be often reinforced by 'avoiding measurement' – in this case, of MTD outcomes – and also by what Pfeffer describes as 'result uncertainty'. The latter occurs when the definition of satisfaction lies in the hands of those being evaluated or when that which is being evaluated has complex and multiple attributes. As Cairns (1997) identifies, much MTD

is not fully evaluated because of the difficulty perceived by MTD/HR professionals of establishing quantifiable results, lack of clear objectives, lack of management time *etc*. In Cairns' study, 32 per cent of companies used HR managers to evaluate MTD activities while 42-49 per cent relied on line managers who, as we have seen, have other priorities.

Similarly, changing market conditions help to legitimise the need for new rules of the game. So MTD enacts new initiatives (*eg* teamworking, IIP, customer focus and process thinking), new rules about what is important and 'flavours of the month' which provide further legitimisation. The role of language is central to the construction of reality, as the vehicle through which legitimisation occurs (Pfeffer, 1981). MTD buzzwords, acronyms and such flavours of the month similarly all contribute to the social construction of a shared MTD reality. Within the industry, different actors have different perceptions about the interpretation of these new rules, yet the resulting arguments only serve to further legitimise MTD as they do not often reflect fundamental disagreement over values or beliefs of the game within which they are colluding (Pfeffer, 1981).

Cairns' (1997) study into MTD evaluation reveals that 65 per cent of respondents did not consistently measure its impact because of difficulties in quantifying results, lack of management involvement, lack of clear objectives and lack of tools and time. Avoiding assessment of outcomes by controlling information (for example, end-of-course 'happy sheets', which are likely to measure reactions rather than learning) is a critical part of creating a dominant definition of reality (Pfeffer, 1981). It is also a way of creating a dominant definition that progress is being made.

The impact of such symbolic action goes some way to answering our question as to why there is activity but little outcome. But why should organisational time and resources be spent on encouraging this legitimisation of MTD activities and then, both overtly and covertly, indicate other priorities? The cause of much of this apparent contradiction can be found embedded in the key HR myth that 'people are our greatest asset'.

THE MYTH THAT PEOPLE MATTER

The 'softer' people management issues described by McGovern *et al* (1997) are critical to HRM and reflect much of the focus of MTD. Through a process of 'developmental humanism', which underlies many HR models (McGovern *et al*, 1997: 27), employees are able to make decisions closer to the customer, are able develop their inherent 'know-how' and use this to become a source of competitive advantage. In this model employees are seen as the organisation's most valuable asset. The *quid pro quo* is that the organisation becomes a place in which individuals can achieve self-actualisation and develop in the wider community of organisational life. This approach sits comfortably with the current vogue of knowledge management in which all employees are encouraged to engage in continual learning to develop the 'learning organisation'. The apparently laudable goal of MTD is therefore to create increased employee awareness and to improve the quality of management to secure a more effective achievement of organisational goals (Hopfl and Dawes, 1995). At the same time, managers are able to develop themselves and others, and to feel more enriched, challenged and valued.

But in considering these ideas, MTD must be viewed from a critical perspective because it is implicitly concerned with issues of order and predictability in organisational performance (Hopfl and Dawes, 1995). MTD, sanctioned by senior management, will in its execution construct impressions of behaviour and attributes that are needed by managers to be successful in any given organisational setting. MTD therefore becomes the advocate and guardian of whatever behaviour is necessary to achieve organisational goals. It is the assumption of business

leaders that 'they have the right to control management behaviour' (Ackers and Preston, 1997). Management development programmes therefore become an opportunity for normative control (Coopey, 1995) in which managers, by their involvement, in effect indicate vulnerability rather than empowered enlightenment (Ackers and Preston, 1997). For many senior managers this may not be necessarily a conscious strategy of manipulation, but perhaps reflects the over-whelming utilitarianism of organisational life – of institutional pressures to meet market expectations and maximise the return on capital before all other concerns. It reflects a perspective which demands that people are seen as extensions of such capital assets (Jones, 1996). This utilitarianism has the effect of turning the idea 'that people are our greatest asset' into a myth. The discussion on corporate culture, management competencies and empowerment serves to obscure more fundamental issues of hegemony and control in organisational life (Coopey, 1995). When push comes to shove, senior managers will promote the unavoidable economic rationality of their decisions. The rules and the goal of the MTD game are therefore very much rooted in a managerialism which mandates the pursuit of economic objectives over social altruism.

Viewing MTD as an agent of normative control provides some insight into why senior management might consider it worthwhile to encourage investment in MTD, but also why this encouragement is unlikely to take precedent over more demanding organisational issues. But even this perspective would suggest that some progress is made through MTD, albeit that it is used as an agent of manipulation. Its use in this way is seemingly contrary to HR philosophy but certainly one which would encourage the increasing investment that MTD attracts. However, introductory analysis suggested that while there was much activity in MTD, there was actually little progress. This aspect of MTD brings us to the question of how the rules of the MTD game are interpreted by the players involved.

PLAYING THE GAME

The efficacy of imposed, top-down change aimed at inculcating new organisational values and cultures has been a subject of considerable debate over recent years (see Willmott, 1993 in particular). This area has fuelled much of the work of MTD as companies have issued value statements, developed competency frameworks and cascaded teamworking programmes. But research (Beer *et al*, 1990; Hope and Hendry, 1995) casts doubt on the effectiveness of these approaches in instilling real behaviour change, as individuals wrestle with the constant interplay between the embracement (acceptance) and distancing (rejection) of new roles (Kunda, 1992). Other research from Dopson and Neumann (1994) into the reaction of middle managers to changing psychological contracts found that managers saw attempts to change attitudes through MTD as a 'sop', lacking relevance and credibility. Research by Denham *et al* (1996) into the responses of managers to the introduction of empowerment initiatives indicates how managers learn to 'surface act' to senior management while adapting policies to suit themselves and their teams. All of these studies point to the increasing managerial cynicism which meets many MTD initiatives inside organisations. Managers, in effect, have come to see the work of much MTD as a 'socially constructed' game that needs to be played in order to survive and prosper in their organisations. Ezzamel *et al* (1996) provide a classic example of such a perspective from a manager who had declined an invitation to attend a team-building weekend and who saw compliance with the behavioural requirements of a new culture as a cynical exercise. 'These guys have been here for 15 years and they have hardly done a day's work in their life, they have played the political game' (1996: 73). The 1998 British Psychological Society conference warned that the battle for the self had begun as organisations attempted to manipulate emotions and loyalty. As John Arnold of Loughborough University put it (Welch, 1998):

> We are starting to question just how much of that sense of self we are prepared
> to put into, or change for, work. Are people prepared to ring-fence certain
> self-perceptions in order to survive?

In order to ring-fence such 'perceptions', an illusion of meaningful 'busyness' is created in which employees interpret the rules and consciously participate in the game to secure identities, promotions, more challenging work, the continuation of a quiet life *etc*, but also to avoid the personal dysfunctions resulting from imposed behaviour change. Investment continues to be made and sanctioned by senior management because to do anything other would clearly reveal the idea that 'people are our greatest asset' as a myth. The idea thus becomes another myth to add to the book of management fables.

The rules of the MTD game are therefore very much interpreted through a lens of self-interest. According to Ezzamel *et al* (1996: 73), this in turn helps create a collective reality in which:

> A capacity to play the political game may often count for more than a capacity and
> willingness to work effectively. Instead of remedying ineffectiveness, HRM-type
> policies and the strengthening of corporate culture may simply act to conceal and
> promote political game-playing in novel ways.

MTD has become trapped in its own game, caught in a vicious cycle in which further investment exacerbates the problem. In the bid to create more competitive organisations, soft HR approaches which promote involvement, empowerment *etc* have developed to allow managers to embed a more effective alignment of people resources. This 'truth, trust, love and collaboration' approach to change (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992) helps create the ritual and symbolism that helps legitimise the MTD agenda, and this creates much of its business. Yet, either because MTD professionals lack credibility, and/or that, in a capitalist work organisation, the company will always place financial objectives ahead of people development, line management receive mixed messages about what is important. Managers respond with public acceptance but private rejection of the messages contained within MTD interventions, in order to ring-fence psychological needs for the preservation of self. The public acceptance stimulates more investment by senior management, thus promulgating the myth that people matter. The game is played and the actors participate, playing the game that everyone pretends has value because it is in their interests to do so, to create promotions, obtain security, avoid redundancy and so on.

From this examination it seems unlikely, given the political environment in which it operates, and indeed unconsciously exacerbates, that MTD is able to break out of its own paradigm. What then of the prospect of change? In Willmott's (1994) analysis of publicly-funded management education, the way forward is seen to be through the application of action learning coupled with critical theory. But even Willmott (1994: 131) believes that the prospect of change within publicly-funded management education through critical action learning is unlikely to gain a warm reception. Similarly, if the opportunity for change from within organisations is equally restrained by a never ending game of self-interest, then perhaps we should ask ourselves: why bother to attempt change at all? Is there anything that can be realistically done to change the situation? The final part of this article will discuss these two key questions.

A WAY FORWARD?

One of the consequences of the current HR philosophy of valuing people as an organisation's greatest asset is an undiscriminating approach to the development of people, insomuch that the knowledge of all employees is seen as a potential source of competitive advantage. Practitioner journals are full of descriptions about how to truly harness the power of people assets by organisations becoming vessels for never-ending personal development in which

all employees continually add to their stock of marketable know-how. Given the kinds of institutional and psychological motives described above, is this possible or even desirable? For example, there are clearly employees who feel pressurised to develop themselves when all they want is a more simple relationship with their employer. There are those who will see their employer as a vehicle for entirely self-serving development, and there are those who will be allegedly valued but will be the first to go when financial performance does not meet market expectations – when reality does not match rhetoric. An undiscriminating approach to the valuing of people as exemplified by much current MTD activity further fuels employee cynicism, creates unrealistic expectations of what could be delivered by organisations in terms of socially-responsible behaviour and undermines other laudable attempts at securing employee trust. Nor is this just an issue for individual organisations.

The power and influence of organisations in our society today is pre-eminent and therefore the impact of managerial culture (the core beliefs, values and meanings which underpin the contemporary management of organisations) on all aspects of our lives is extremely pervasive. Consequently the impact of MTD as a guardian of such managerialism has a significance on our lives well beyond the classroom. But this managerialism is founded on a technical rationality, economy and effectiveness which, when exercised through MTD, tends to suppress issues of values, choices and interests (Coopey, 1995). Managerialism, supported by MTD, is failing to provide the purposeful meaning we as human beings need and seek and is often serving to the detriment of human interests (Bowles, 1997). The wider social effects of an undiscriminating approach to the management of people are therefore substantial. MTD must therefore be elevated beyond pursuing meaningless outcomes. There is a lot to be 'bothered' about in the way that MTD is currently enacted within organisations.

But how can we manage to deliver increasing value from MTD in the future without simply being undiscriminating in its use? If people and their development are more important than ever before for the future effectiveness of organisations, and we are not to simplistically value employees in an undiscriminating way that ultimately generates mistrust and cynicism, then one option is to look for managers who can take a discriminating and critically-reflective view about the employment of people. We must be able to develop managers who can differentiate when it might be important to value people for organisational effectiveness and when to value them for reasons of social responsibility. In effect we return to the territory of Willmott's critical action learning but with change being stimulated from within organisations, by MTD.

MTD could be used to encourage managers to explore the nature of their relationship with their organisation and, in doing so, to raise issues of control to the surface (Hopfl and Dawes, 1995). But who will do this? Our analysis so far would suggest that there can be only a small minority of MTD professionals who are capable of such potentially subversive action. For a minority to be influential, it needs to be active, and perceived as confident, competent, coherent and distinctive (Moscovici, 1976). However, as we have seen, this description is not likely to be applied to MTD professionals by a line management majority and therefore unlikely to be influential on its own (Mugny *et al*, 1984). Greater initial impact may be made through the development of line managers themselves who are perceived to be part of the majority and therefore able to exert influence from within (Mugny *et al*, 1984). Those of us involved in management education and MTD, who have a unique opportunity to both challenge and work inside organisations, could be providing companies with a more sophisticated development process for managers than anticipated by sponsors. This would consciously and deliberately raise the awareness of line managers about the rules of the game in which they are operating (Johnson *et al*, 1997) and the fact that these rules are socially constructed and open to redefinition. While this subversive approach may seem unlikely to succeed, given the forgone analysis of institutionalised power relations, it may be usefully tied to a substantial and emerging organisational need.

The requirement to develop organisations that can build on employee know-how and can innovate and respond to ever-increasing change (Miles *et al*, 1997) 'implies a fundamental reconceptualisation of the underlying management philosophy' (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1997: 12). This realisation similarly requires a fundamentally different approach to organisation development. In response to many years of failed organisation change initiatives (Beer *et al*, 1990), recent attention has been given to developing the idea of 'pockets of good practice' within organisations as an effective approach to creating the emergent, organic change required in the future (Beer *et al*, 1990; Butcher *et al*, 1997; Frohman, 1997; Hendry, 1996). Such pockets are also necessarily subversive, achieving a balance between maintaining internal cohesion, being organisationally credible in terms of differentiated performance and managing the political environment. Through linked communities of good practice, 'knowledge, rules for action and culture are spread' (Hendry, 1996: 628). By focusing on the development of key individuals, organisational change can be created from within rather than top-down (Butcher *et al*, 1997).

The ability of managers to engage in this type of activity requires considerable reflective thinking, self-knowledge and personal influence, requiring us to move far beyond a restrictive and simplistic competency framework (Antonacopoulou and Fitzgerald, 1996) to develop managers as whole human beings acting in a socially complex and ever-changing environment (Brown, 1993; Butcher *et al*, 1997). Furthermore, to create greater degrees of social responsibility:

> [Development processes must reflect that managers] have other and wider responsibilities, as citizens, members of local communities *etc*. Their decisions do not just affect the performance of the company for which they work for but can have major effects on the quality and quantity of life enjoyed by virtually all members of society and, increasingly, the planet.

> *Willmott, 1994: 110*

Is this possible? Like Willmott, I am pessimistic but I do believe progress can occur within a capitalist work organisation (1994: 130). If we can map issues of social responsibility onto the existing terrain of management development by embedding these ideas into agendas which are meaningful and pragmatic for practising managers, then perhaps change might be initiated from below. From a critical perspective, it might be argued that managers will always be prevented from taking non-instrumental, socially-responsible action by organisational control systems which ensure that managers act in accordance with the organisation's long-term economic interests. However, this assumes that such managerial action will be taken without a clear view of 'the true nature of the game in which they find themselves' (Jones, 1996: 22).

Once again, the central issue is one of exposing the rules of the game. In this regard, recent work by Butcher *et al* (1997) and Clarke (1998), into the development of general managers on a portfolio of public programmes, has shown the effectiveness of a development process which tightly integrates new managerial knowledge with personal development. Personal development is designed to trigger a discontinuity (Conger and Xin, 1996) in existing mental models and initiate a transformational cycle (Quinn, 1988). Because this process is embedded in real world managerial issues, participants are able to make step changes in a number of key 'meta-abilities'; these are important because they underpin and determine how and when knowledge, skills and competencies are used. For example, one of these meta-abilities concerns the area of cognitive flexibility and complexity: being able to be critical of what is happening around you, and being able to notice and interpret conflicting agendas. This is essential in being able to read the rules of the game. While the development of such meta-abilities is still relatively new, early indications suggest that this may be a meaningful future direction for MTD activity to enable it to surface issues of control and social responsibility.

Such developments will not happen without the academic community moving beyond scholarly debate and the pursuit of research gradings (Willmott, 1994). It needs to take a

greater degree of social responsibility for its own actions if it is to encourage managers to be 'strategic termites' (Morgan, 1993: 41). These may only be possible through organisationally-initiated MTD delivered through university business schools, with greater opportunities for generating critical reflective thinking among managers with power and influence to make a difference through the creation of pockets of good practice. By also working with MTD professionals themselves, we can initiate a critical dialogue about the potential value of MTD to develop managers who can take a discriminating and socially-responsible approach to people development. This in turn may engender a real insight about the potentially significant organisational and social role of MTD. However, much of the industry is run through private enterprise and profits enormously from the current 'game'; they will accordingly resist attempts to change the rules. This places an even greater emphasis on 'educators' to challenge existing MTD practices and providers, perhaps by investing equal amounts of time working and communicating in a meaningful language with line managers in companies and practitioner magazines as we do in academic journals. A valuable impact could also be made by challenging the rules at practitioner rather than academic conferences, where much legitimisation of new approaches begins; these also provide an opportunity to present realistic alternatives to current practice. Perhaps educators need to raise the stakes by lobbying for more sophisticated qualification standards within the industry that move us beyond another reductionist competency framework; you need a licence to own a dog but not to run a training consultancy. Those of us in management education who are also involved in MTD within organisations thus need to play a role in undermining the assumptions and values that create the rules of the game and that, through our inaction, we implicitly participate.

Paradoxically therefore, MTD could become extremely influential as a catalyst for organisational (and social) change, but this would require those involved to reveal their own ineffectiveness and to expose that we have been trapped in the same game. It would also require us to create our own 'pockets of good practice' in order that we are seen as active, competent, coherent and distinctive. In order to encourage this perception, those of us involved in management education and development should be forcing a new seriousness among managers about critical questions such as: organisational effectiveness for whom?; efficiency for what purpose?; and competition to what end?

SUMMARY

Much has been written about the potential role of MTD in helping to secure greater employee autonomy and quality of working life but, despite the promise, it has failed to really meet these expectations. Using a political game-playing perspective, this article has shown how within a capitalist framework the social and psychological needs and survival instincts of organisational actors create a vicious cycle of inactivity. MTD provides a complex game in which roles and actions can be organisationally justified, but in doing so helps to generate a myth that is detrimental both to organisational morale and individual well-being.

Future organisational success – however that might be measured – seems to hinge on the ability of companies to harness the contribution of people in a socially responsible way which does not resort to laudable yet naive humanist motives which obscure the real issues of power and control. Ironically, it is MTD itself which could be most effective in initiating change, but to do this professionals will have to expose themselves as part of the game they wish to change. Creating change from within existing organisational power relations may be achieved by creating pockets of good, socially responsible managerial practice. There are some limited, early signs that progress may be possible in raising the awareness of these type of issues among practising managers (Clarke 1998; Butcher *et al*, 1997). The enormity of the task should be no justification for inaction.

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