Pedagogical Practice and Postmodernist Ideas^{*}

Cynthia Hardy

Department of Management, Faculty of Economics, & Commerce
University of Melbourne, Parkville, Vic 3052

Australia

Tel: 61-3-9344-4000; Email: Hardy@Management.Mcgill.ca

and

Ian Palmer

Faculty of Business, University of Technology, Sydney,

PO Box 123 Broadway, NSW 2007 Australia

Tel: 61-2-9514-3606; Fax: 61-2-9514-3602; Email: I.palmer@uts.edu.au

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Abstract

Postmodern approaches to management and organizational theory raise a number of particular challenges for management educators. This paper explores how instructors can present postmodern ideas in the context of management education and explore their implications for management practice. We identify four postmodern themes: the notion of complicated identities; the "death" of the individual as expert; "disciplinary" powers which constrain individual actions; and the postmodern organization as a combination of dream and nightmare. To demonstrate the ambiguities and paradoxes associated with each theme, we outline in-class exercises to surface postmodern ideas.

Introduction

Postmodern approaches are relatively new to management and organizational theory. They raise a number of particular challenges for management education. First, what constitutes postmodernism is a highly ambiguous and contested debate. Second, there is no single postmodern theory or approach, but *theories* and *approaches*. In repudiating the very idea of a definitive or overarching theory, practice or experience of organizations, many postmodern writers aim to open up multiple interpretations and meanings through nuance, complexity and irony and not, as teachers often seek to do, to make things more accessible and transparent (Legge, 1995; Rosenau, 1992). Third, some postmodernists reject the very idea of education, considering it to be "violence". Business schools "are factories of the mind" that search for convergent explanations and "right" answers (Letiche, 1992; White, & Jacques, 1995). Practical applications are also repudiated on the grounds that they "neuter", "tame" and "harness" postmodernist ideas for the benefit of consultants (Burrell, 1993: 82).

These problems present the management educator, who wishes to expose his or her students to postmodernist ideas and explore their implications for management practice, with substantial challenges. Nonetheless, postmodernism *is* gaining increasing coverage in organization and management theory and, as instructors become more familiar with these ideas, they naturally want to share them with their students (e.g., Boje, & Dennehy, 1994; Hatch, 1997; Rosile, & Boje, 1996). We seek to facilitate this process by identifying four themes that emerge from the postmodern literature and by devising exercises that instructors can use to help surface the various ideas and debates associated with them. It is, however, important to note that this is *not* a paper about postmodern theorizing. We do not have the luxury here to enter into the complex debates about how postmodernism is constituted. Instead, in the following section we provide a brief overview of postmodern ideas. We explore the language used to convey these ideas and describe four particular themes

embedded in postmodernism. The remainder of the paper takes each of these themes and shows how they might be used in the classroom.

Postmodernist Ideas

Postmodernism is fraught with a degree of debate, disagreement and emotion rarely found in the usually more phlegmatic world of organization and management theory (e.g., Kilduff, & Mehra, 1997). In this section we provide an overview of key debates in postmodernism whilst at the same time acknowledging that what constitutes postmodernism remains a contested terrain. This overview is designed for the benefit of readers who are unfamiliar with postmodern literature and we encourage those interested in learning more about these debates to consult the literature directly.

Postmodernism is, as one might expect, linked to modernism — the period when "modern" science attacked the authority of church and monarch emphasizing, instead, rigorous, objective methods of inquiry (Cooper, & Burrell, 1988; Rosenau, 1992). These methods became acknowledged attributes of a "modern", industrial society (Alvesson, 1995; Parker, 1992). Postmodernism — a term first coined in the 1960s by literary critics (see Brown, 1994) — reflected growing dissatisfaction and unease with the lack of progress of modern society and the fallibility of modern science. It represented a concerted effort to question the defining belief of modernism — the superiority of the present over the past (Rosenau, 1992).

Postmodernism gained wider popularity in the 1970s and 1980s in architecture, the arts and, more recently, in the social sciences and in management and organization theory. Key individuals associated with the growing interest in postmodernism included French philosophers such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard. Their work has been taken up by writers in organization and management theory, where it evolved into a variety of different approaches (Boje, Gephart, & Thatchenkery,

1996; Rosenau, 1992). For example, some writers concentrated on postmodernism as a *period* in which society is characterized by newly emerging features, different from those associated with modern industrial society (for example, Lash, & Urry, 1987; Thompson, 1993). Others proposed new ways of studying social phenomena in the form of postmodern *perspectives*. These two paths translate into the "postmodern organization"(Clegg, 1990), discussed below; and "postmodern theorizing", which embodies a series of ideas concerning the way in which our world is constituted, as well as our ability to study it (Cooper, & Burrell, 1988).

Postmodern theorizing tries to undermine taken-for-granted assumptions. In this regard, postmodernism can be considered as a theory of knowledge which, simply put, amounts to the belief that the "real" is not out there, awaiting discovery but is created out of the language that we use and power relations in which we are entwined. Accordingly, there is no singular reality but multiple ones, none of which should be given a privileged or special status over others. But because we often accept certain views, ideas, experiences, and images without thinking we must strive continually to critique our assumptions; not in the hope of finding an ultimate truth but, rather, in the hope of finding new and different "truths" not previously considered (see Legge, 1995: 306-7). Postmodernists argue that one view, which has been inappropriately privileged, is that of "the" organization rather than the processes of *organizing*. Hence, one goal of postmodern theorizing is to explore the more ephemeral aspects of organizing in terms of the implications for both the entity known as the organization, as well as the entities called individuals who work in and around them. Thus many postmodern writers suggest a concern with "becoming" rather than "being"(Chia, 1995; Cooper, & Burrell, 1988). For example, categories such as the "organization" and the "individual" are not pre-existing entities but, rather, are always in the process of being

shaped, recognized, categorized and situated as particular kinds of organizations and individuals.

Some writers have attempted to take these ideas to their limit, earning for their work the epithet of "hard", "skeptical", or "pessimistic" postmodernism (see Boje *et al.*, 1996; Rosenau, 1992). This form of postmodernism is anti-intellectual because *no* statements may be privileged, not even those of postmodern critics. By dwelling on the powerlessness of so-called "individuals", the ephemeral nature of supposed "institutions", and the transitory quality of "truth", adherents of such views can only dismiss scholarly work (Rosenau, 1992). Such an approach, or anything close to it, presents difficulties in management and organization theory where the field has been particularly resistant to postmodernism (Kilduff, & Mehra, 1997; Linstead, Grafton Small, & Jeffcutt, 1996). Consequently, postmodern writers on organizations have often limited their role to one of critique — a "soft" version of postmodernism. Rather than abandon modernity and reason altogether, they recognize the ontological existence of the social world, however precarious and fluid, and focus on the location of alternative interpretations, marginalized voices, and diverse readings (see Boje *et al.*, 1996; Parker, 1992; Rosenau, 1992; Tsoukas, 1992).

To explore these ideas, a new "language" of postmodernism has emerged, some of which we translate in table 1. We provide examples of a number of postmodern terms along with our attempt to clarify what they mean in the context of our overview of postmodernism. We do so for a number of reasons. First, the table may help orient readers who are unfamiliar with postmodernism. Second, the table highlights the breadth of ideas associated with postmodernism, which instructors may be interested in exploring with their students, even though we are not able to cover them in detail here. Third, the table helps to provide a common basis for our subsequent discussion of specific postmodern themes. Finally, instructors may also find the table a useful way to introduce postmodern ideas to their

students, many of whom will encounter difficulty in reading postmodern literature. Our experience is that students struggling with the terminology, particularly when their first language is neither English nor French, appreciate help in deciphering key terms. Accordingly, instructors might simply explain the table in a general or introductory management course; or, in the context of a more advanced or specialized course, instructors might ask students to find examples of each term or to contest and debate the terms.

[Table 1 about here]

While there will always be dispute over exactly what constitutes postmodern writings, we can identify four reoccurring themes in postmodernist writings, which we explore below. We do not claim that these themes represent a postmodern "essence" or that they are the only themes that can be distilled from postmodernist writings. However, we do suggest that these themes are commonly associated with postmodern perspectives and can be usefully explored in class to challenge commonly held assumptions about organizations and organizing, as well as management and pedagogical practice.

The first three themes all challenge the notion of the "self-contained" individual — a focal point of many organization and management theories that view the individual as a discrete identity, who can be rewarded, directed and controlled. These themes are: the notion of complicated identities; the "death" of the individual as expert; and the "decentering" of the individual through the constraining effects of spiderless webs of "disciplinary" power. The fourth theme relates to the postmodern organization, and whether and how it differs from traditional bureaucracies. For some writers, this new form of organizing is a "dream" in so far as it is a liberating experience for those people within it; for others it is a nightmare as new controls, surveillance techniques and other disciplinary devices trap and regulate mind and

body alike. We attempt to confront the dualism associated with these two views and, instead, explore the tensions and paradoxes that link them.

Exploring the Themes

The rest of this paper explores each of these themes in turn. We first provide the theoretical background associated with each theme and then present an exercise that can be used to explore some aspect of it. We are deliberately vague in terms of specifying in what subjects such material should be taught since it does not fall neatly into classic subject distinctions, and can be raised in classes as diverse as management skills, strategy, organization behavior and organization theory. In recognition of this, the exercises have been designed for use in both undergraduate and graduate classes, and with students who have business experience, as well as those who do not. They run from between 40 and 60 minutes, depending on the amount of time the instructor wishes to spend debriefing. Instructors can either use all the exercises or select individual exercises as a "stand alone" activity, depending on their particular needs.

Theme 1: Complicated Identities

Postmodern insights focus attention on the multiple, fragile, complex, fluid and fragmented processes, which comprise individual identities (Laclau, & Mouffe, 1987; Rosenau, 1992). There is, according to this view, no "true" self and people do not exhibit personal characteristics. Rather, as Goffman (1959) pointed out some years ago, "the self" is constituted differently through a variety of "performances" in different times and places. However, postmodern writers warn that we must be careful not to assume that these performances speak for themselves regardless of who witnesses them. Instead, we should consider identity to be "a continuous process of narration where both the narrator and audience formulate, edit, applaud and refuse various elements of the constantly-produced narrative (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1996: 160). There is, then, not one autobiography but many

autobiographical acts, formal and informal, which reinforce and contradict each other. Some will dominate others at particular points in time: "It is not sufficient to select an attractive identity and then present it. [It] ... must be accepted by other actors involved" (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1996: 169). These insights point out that these identities are not something possessed by the individual but, rather, they represent signs — attributes, actions, characteristics, scripts — which are *recognized* by themselves and others as relevant in particular settings.

These views of identity challenge conventional notions in a number of contradictory ways. Some postmodern writers downplay the role of the subject altogether. Since identities provide individuals with a sense of self worth they are difficult to change since repudiation involves significant personal costs (Knights, & Willmott, 1989). According to this view, identity is fragile and not completely controlled by the individual who "possesses" it. Hence, individual identity almost disappears from view, existing only in so far as others recognize it. Other writers, especially those who have used postmodernism in the context of feminist theory, have tried to give voice to particular subjects, notably the role of women and minorities in the organization (Rosenau, 1992). They draw attention to the multiplicity of identities which make up an individual, and the circumstances in which they are recognized (see Calás, & Smircich, 1996).

A number of organizational implications emerge from these insights. First, people should be seen as *in* but not *of* the organization. The organization carries only some parts of the individual's identity and, within that, often recognizes only particular taken-for-granted aspects. Second, the relevance of "dualities", such as the traditional identity distinction between nonmanagers and managers, is questioned. Writers note, for example, that this distinction breaks down as practices associated with empowerment, such as more self and peer management (Barker, 1993), become more widespread. Third, it is argued that another traditional duality of identity — that of the division between work and nonwork spheres —

cannot be maintained. Over time, this has been reinforced by organizations supplying crèches, counseling for alcoholics, job sharing, tele-working, and paternity leave. Work and non-work spheres are enfolded into each other in a complex and interdependent relationship. Fourth, in emphasizing the socially constructed nature of identities, postmodern work draws our attention to the link between individual and collective identity. Individuals acquire identity through the minutiae of being on the innovation team; a member of the management committee; sending out memos; and sitting in on meetings. With continued conversations, the identity extends beyond the individual and comes to be constituted through collective and group means (Collins, 1981). Finally, management practice and organization theory help to constitute particular identities —marginalizing some and giving voice to others. It is this aspect which we explore in the exercise which follows.

Exercise 1: Constituting Identity — Analysis of Visual Representations

Aim: to demonstrate the fluid nature of identity and the continuous processes whereby identity is constructed and reconstructed in organizational accounts of "success" and, in particular, to explore changes in the production of marginalized identities of race and gender.

Exercise: ask students to select two annual reports from a major company, one from the 1960s and one from the 1990s. They should then locate photographs and pictures in these reports and consider the following questions:

1. What types of people are present in these pictures? What types of people whom you would expect to be working in the organization are absent from these pictures? Why?
2. What prominent messages are conveyed in these pictures?
3. One role of annual reports is the presentation of organizational successes. What organizational identities are associated with "success"? How do they change?
4. How do these pictures categorize individuals? What do they tell us about the categories of people *in* the organization? Do they, for example, demarcate managers and nonmanagers?

Do they create other identities for people working in the organizations? Do they tell us anything about these people's lives *outside* the organization?

Running the exercise: instructors can either supply annual reports or ask students to bring them to class having already considered the questions above. In small groups, students can discuss what patterns emerged in the 1960s and 1990s and whether they were common to different organizations. These findings can then be presented to the class in plenary.

Debriefing issues and questions: students can be asked for explanations for the patterns and changes that they have discerned in the annual reports by discussing how identities are created and recreated through organizational practices and by wider social forces beyond the organization. Instructors can concentrate the discussion on who was left out of the pictures — who was absent and silent? Instructors can also ask students to think about the future — how might identity in annual reports be constructed in thirty years time? Students might also consider how marginalized identities might gain a voice by considering the link between particular identities and success, and by identifying the management practices that reinforce these links. Finally, the instructor can discuss how identities are created not only through pictures but also through organizational practices that serve both to categorize and compartmentalize individuals.

Theme 2: The "Death" of the Expert

Postmodernism undermines the whole conception of an expert, consultant or teacher as someone with privileged insight (Legge, 1995; White, & Taket, 1994). Instead, experts are conjured into existence because of a need for their presence. No postmodernist would believe that they have the right answers, only that they are subjects whose knowledge and identity has been constituted as privileged in a particular setting by their actions and by those around them. Such insights are not confined to postmodern writers. For example, Silverman (1985; White, & Taket, 1994) points out that experts treat their engagements as a product to be

transferred between people like a package. They distance themselves by treating the client's role as one of passive acceptance and their superiority is influenced by the social acceptability of scientific methods. Postmodernists take these insights further by emphasizing the societal and historical context in which the activities associated with expertise have derived meaning, as well as the role of the "consumer" in contributing meaning to, and reading meaning in, interactions and texts.

Consequently, postmodernist analysis suggests that "experts" offer pre-packaged solutions. Experts are socialized into a career with norms, rules, policies, language, and procedures. Consequently, their solutions are inevitably shaped by the discourses and practices to which they have been subjected, a process of which they may be more or less unaware. Postmodernism shows us that experts have no monopoly on the "truth", but simply produce knowledge, which attains a privileged status in the context of particular power relationships. In other words, the status of being an expert has less to do with any special knowledge or skills, and more to do with being perceived as consistent with ideas of what an expert should be and do.

This discussion suggests that we need to reflect on why someone is deemed to be an expert. If we do not do so, we risk excluding other forms of knowledge. Experts often impose one-dimensional meanings on situations to protect their status — if there are multiple definitions of problems and multiple ways to solve them, why bother to hire an expert? The expert's privileged status rests on the ability to oust ambiguity in favor of certainty. They may, therefore, be ill equipped to see or to tolerate the different "stories" that make up the organization. Moreover, there is nothing about the expert's voice which is definitive or natural — it is simply one voice in a contested arena which has managed to drown out other voices that may be equally "expert". According to this view, "experts" may be scattered

throughout the organization, but lack “voice” and are not “heard” because they do not subscribe to dominant discourses.

Exercise 2: Constructing The Expert: An Analysis Of Films

Aim: to explore how expertise and the expert are socially constructed; to identify the mechanisms that support the construction of the expert; and to identify the conditions under which "expertise" breaks down.

Exercise: prior to class ask students to view one of two films: "Being There" or "Dave" or, alternatively show these films, or excerpts from them, during class.

Running the exercise: divide the class into four groups, two related to each film, and ask students to consider the following questions:

1. How did the lead character come to be an expert?
2. Who perceived the lead character as an expert and why?
3. What actions or events reinforced their status as expert?
4. Did their positions as experts break down? Why/not?

Ask the groups to present their answers to a plenary session of the class or conduct a general discussion of what the groups have learned.

Debriefing issues and questions: instructors can ask a range of related questions.

What do the films tell us about the construction and deconstruction of experts? Apply this analysis to the classroom: what processes reinforce the production of the teacher as expert? What factors cause the teacher's status as expert to break down? Instructors can ask students with experience to apply the analysis to consultants and management "gurus" or identify specific experts within their organizations. How do these experts generate "solutions" to organizational problems? What are the implications for management practice? Should organizations take more notice of "non-expert" voices. If so, how can these voices be recognized?

Theme 3: Constrained Actors and Spiderless Webs

Postmodern approaches, through their conceptualization of power, remind us of the limits to individual action. According to this view, individuals are trapped in "spiderless" webs of power relationships that comprise our world. These webs are not single-mindedly constructed to achieve control; rather they are webs that grow out of a past; change in response to accidental events, and emerge to entrap the very people who are advantaged by them (Deetz, 1992a; 1992b; also see Parry, & Morriss, 1975). It is a discursive web where pre-existing ideas, vocabularies, and techniques culminate, in conjunction with events in the past and from outside the organization, in particular forms of organizing.

Of particular importance here is the work of Michel Foucault (Dreyfus, & Rabinow, 1982; Foucault, 1977; 1980; 1982; 1984; Smart, 1985) which is increasingly being applied to organizational settings (Alvesson, & Willmott, 1992a, 1992b; Clegg, 1989; Deetz, 1992a, 1992b; Kerfoot, & Knights, 1993; Knights, 1992; Knights, & Willmott, 1989; Knights, & Morgan, 1991). These writers show how Foucault's work contests the concept of sovereign power: he repudiates the idea of an isolated agent who possesses and mobilizes a battery of power sources to produce particular outcomes. Instead, he conceptualizes power as a network of relations and discourses that capture advantaged and disadvantaged alike in its web. Individuals may act with the intention of achieving certain outcomes; but pulling the "strings" of power does not necessarily produce them. According to this view, power is not a convenient resource that can be manipulated by autonomous, sovereign actors. Instead, all individuals are subjected to "disciplinary" power — a prevailing web of relations which resides in every perception, judgment and act.

These views suggest that the reasons behind particular forms of organizing are to be found, not in the minds and plans of managers, but in the ebbs and flows of broader societal and historical trends (Willmott, 1995). So, for example, Knights, & Willmott (1995) show

how business practices in the UK have been shaped by the growth of Thatcherism and the "New Right". Other work has noted the infiltration of corporatist principles of organizing to the public sector, such as universities (Hardy 1991). Writers argue that the adoption of discourses and practices of "downsizing" often stem from institutional pressures rather than conscious, rational design (Dunford, & Palmer, 1996). Postmodern critiques of accounting reveal that techniques like standard cost accounting and budgeting are not "natural", but evolved in a historical context in which notions of efficiency were of paramount concern. Much like the principles of scientific management, which standardized the shop floor to produce efficient workers, standard cost accounting practices offered to embrace everyone in the firm by "engineering" the "organizationally useful person" (Miller, & O'Leary, 1987: 261; also see Arrington, & Francis, 1989; Hoskin, & Maeve, 1987).

These webs of power do not just discipline the mind, they also discipline the body. Employees have both discursive and bodily capabilities that challenge, potentially at least, the control of their employers. Consequently, the body has to be trained to be a productive force (Boje, 1996; Clegg, 1989; Hetrick, & Boje, 1992). This interest in the body stems from Foucault's work on panoptic control (Hetrick, & Boje, 1992). The panopticon was an idea of Jeremy Bentham for a nineteenth century prison. Its architecture provided omnipresent but invisible surveillance. Since inmates *might* be under surveillance at any point in time, they policed — or disciplined — their bodies. Writers have extended these ideas to the technological surveillance of computers, communication satellites, and telecommunications, which make it possible to monitor large populations without a cumbersome architectural construction, as well as through new management practices like team-building and empowerment. In different ways, these practices and technologies represent forms of bio-power which help to produce docile bodies.

Exercise 3: Caught in the Surveillance Web?

Aim: to identify mechanisms for disciplining members of business and other organizations and to examine how these mechanisms constrain action; also to uncover the potential for local resistance to these practices.

Exercise: ask students to read the following case — a summary of the findings of a survey conducted by the American Management Association survey.

"Nearly two-thirds of employers record employee voice mail, E-mail or phone calls, review computer files or videotaped workers. ...Moreover...up to a quarter of companies that spy don't tell their employees. In almost all cases it's perfectly legal. Employers can secretly record and review almost anything a worker does, short of, say, videotaping the bathroom stalls. The survey looked at 900 midsize and large AMA member companies. The findings — 63 per cent of companies use some surveillance or monitoring, and up to 23 per cent don't tell workers...The most common forms of surveillance are: the tallying of phone numbers called and duration of calls (37 per cent of companies); videotaping of employees' work (16 per cent); storing and reviewing of E-mail (15 per cent); and storing and reviewing computer files (14 per cent)."

Eric Rolfe Greenberg, who directed the study for the AMA, a nonprofit management training group argued that monitoring "can work to the customers' benefit".

(Adapted from Jackson, 1997: p. D8).

Running the exercise: ask students to discuss or prepare the following questions.

1. What does the case tell you about forms of surveillance in organizations? Explain how these forms of surveillance work. Do they discipline the mind, the body or both?
2. What other "disciplinary" processes exist at different levels? Are managers also subject to "disciplinary" controls? If so, in what form? What impact do they have?
3. How do organizations use time (e.g., clocking in/off, flexi-time, telecommuting), space (e.g., office space, meeting rooms, management "retreats") and speech (e.g. the use of first names, titles, acronyms and terminology) to control members?

4. Is it possible to resist these various forms of surveillance? How? What forms of resistance have you observed or heard about? How effective were they?

Debriefing issues and questions: in a general discussion, instructors can ask about the constraining effects of surveillance in organizations. Students with experience will probably prefer to talk about the situation in organizations in which they have worked. Students without experience can talk about how universities discipline and control (see Boje, 1996), but they should also consider the forms of control they will face when they leave school and take up jobs. Instructors can ask how particular forms of surveillance develop and whether different organizational identities are subject to different controls. They might question whether a particular form of surveillance is open to multiple interpretations, for example, how are accounting controls viewed by members of the accounting department compared to members of the customer service department? Finally, instructors can explore different ways in which resistance to these processes occurs.

Theme 4: The Postmodern Organization

The postmodern organizational form has been used as a contrast to bureaucratic forms of organization. These organizations are loosely coupled, fluid, organic and adhocratic instead of the static bureaucratic structures that have traditionally preoccupied much of the organization literature. Writers draw attention to organizations whose distinctiveness and solidity is becoming increasingly suspect as the boundaries that "separate" them from other organizations become more and more permeable through outsourcing, alliances and networks (e.g., Alter, & Hage, 1993; Kanter, 1994; Miles, & Snow, 1995). They point to the virtual corporation, which exists only as a transient collection of electronic linkages between ephemeral entities that donate their core competencies to a temporary collaboration (Handy, 1995). Internally, organization structure is increasingly difficult to pin down as fluidity, flexibility and fast response break down the barriers between formerly discrete levels and

departments. Activities that would be centralized at corporate headquarters or divided into clear divisional or departmental responsibilities in the modern organization are, instead, "distributed" among an evolving internal network of units (e.g., Clegg, & Hardy, 1996; Galbraith, & Lawler, 1993).

Other traditional barriers are also evaporating: organizations have traditionally been seen as specific to a particular point in time, space and history. With the advent of electronic mail, cyberspace, and telecommunications technology, however, these certainties are breaking down. So, we have the "global village", 24-hour operations; and multiple uses of office space (where companies rent out their offices to another organization at night, or engage in "hot desking"). Postmodern work contributes to the recognition that space and time are not natural phenomena; rather, our experiences of time and space are subject to disciplinary practices, such as those referred to above, which are imposed upon us (Clegg, & Hardy, 1996).

Some writers, however, remain dubious of whether organizations are entering a postmodern period. They question the extent of change in society and dispute that either the post-industrial society or the postmodern organization is as present or pervasive as postmodern writers suggest (Thompson, 1993). Alvesson (1995: 1070) points to contradictory findings, noting that when two authors examine Sweden, one calls it a museum of modernist management while the other sees it as an intriguing set of postmodern possibilities. Tsoukas (1992) argues that the postmodern organization merely represents a reiteration of contingency theory that can be traced as far back as Burns, & Stalker's (1961) work on mechanistic and organic forms of organization.

Exercise 4: Debating the Postmodern Organization

Aim: to demonstrate multiple perspectives regarding claims about the postmodern organization; and to confront the notion of “dualism” which underpins many of these competing claims.

Exercise: divide the class into three groups: give one group a copy of the "dream" column in Table 2 and a second group a copy of the "nightmare" column. Ask these two groups to prepare for a debate entitled: "The postmodern organization will liberate all". The third group acts as the audience and decides which group "won" the debate.

Table 2 about here

Running the exercise: up to eight different people in each of the two debating groups can participate on the debating team by taking one of the arguments from the relevant column.

1. Ask students to prepare for the debate by using examples and justifications for their arguments.
2. Run the debate.
3. Allow the third group time to deliberate and to decide on a winner and then to explain their decision. Then ask them to lead a discussion on how they experienced the multiple perspectives with which they were confronted.
4. Ask all students to consider both columns and to debate the tensions and paradoxes that link the two views and to consider whether they can be reconciled and, if so, how. Can we move beyond the “dualism” associated with these differing perspectives?

Debriefing issues and questions: to explore how we can move beyond either/or distinctions that are embodied in the logic of “dualism”, instructors can deconstruct the assessment of the third group concerning which team “won”. For example, they can ask the

members of the third group to consider the impact their assumptions and experiences had on their assessment. To what extent were contradictory views expressed within the group and how did they deal with them? How did issues of context, gender, position, and stage in career affect their interpretations?

Instructors might also explore the paradox of dream and nightmare in more depth. How specifically does it apply to individuals in organizations? They might then point to different approaches to dealing with paradox. For example, one approach is to clarify questions of time and space i.e., do the contradictory aspects of the paradox co-exist at different points in time, or in different parts or locations of the organization? Another approach is to explore ways of familiarizing individuals with the specific paradoxes that comprise their work environment and suggest how they might use them to generate creative outcomes. For example, instructors can ask students to identify the paradoxes they experience and to see whether juxtaposing the contradictory aspects generates new insights. For more details on approaches to dealing with paradoxes see Poole, & Van de Ven (1989: 566).

Conclusion

As we mentioned in the beginning of this article, postmodern approaches raise a number of challenges for management education. First, the nature of postmodernism is contested, even by those who subscribe to postmodern perspectives. Notwithstanding such debate, we maintain that a number of important themes traverse different postmodern approaches, and these themes form the basis of this article. Second, in keeping with the aim of postmodern writers to open up multiple interpretations and meanings, the exercises in this paper are a specific attempt to help students identify and appreciate the complexities and nuances of organizational life. Third, while some postmodernists reject the very notion of education, we believe that postmodern themes and insights make a valuable contribution to

our understanding of organizations and therefore deserve a place in the management curriculum.

Thus the postmodern issues addressed in this paper draw attention to the uncertainties, ambiguities and paradoxes of organizational life. They remind management educators to think about how the entities that we may think of as discrete, fixed and tangible are, rather, a product of our language and thinking. This refers to educational institutions and pedagogical practice as well as to organizations and business practice. Postmodernist writers often regard the emphasis on "organizations", which characterizes management education, as a ploy to direct attention away from controversial issues about the social and incomplete nature of organizing and its consequences. Similarly, they argue that the priority and solidity which is often attached to concepts such as "individuals", "organization", "society", "decision", and "strategic advantage" distorts understanding by suggesting that action, movement, and relationships are peripheral, rather than central, to social life. These writers push us to consider organizations as masks, behind which there is simply another mask: what we see is what we have learned to see. Accordingly, we present the exercises in this paper without providing concrete "answers". Instead, we conceive of them as a way of stimulating students and instructors alike to consider the extent to which we are all trapped by existing ways of thinking, and whether we can think differently about work and pedagogy.

TABLE 1

A Postmodern Lexicon

The Linguistic Turn	The language that we use does not reflect "reality" but rather it defines what we know and how we know it. Language produces the objects of which it speaks.
Hyper-reality	Reality does not exist; it is simply an image created by the language we use; there are multiple "realities" none of which are more or less real than the others; hyper-reality is a reproduction of a reality, a "real" illusion.
Representation	Since there is no single reality, any situation is open to multiple interpretations and, therefore, multiple representations.
Decentering the subject	Individuals are not distinct, identifiable, autonomous actors that possess specific characteristics, but are embedded in webs of relationships that produce multiple, fluid identities for them, as well as constrain and enable the actions they take.
Discourse	Discourse refers to the statements, texts activities, practices and interactions that surround and constitute a phenomenon which often create an image of inevitability and naturalness that invisibly and pervasively reinforces their existence.
Local Narratives and Lost Voices	No single "grand" theory explains the world; instead situations must be studied and understood at a local level, with particular attention to diversity, and to those voices at the periphery.
Différance	Our understanding of current situations and problems is a product of taken-for-granted categories that rely on or defer to comparisons with other, different situations and past experiences. For example, "organization" only makes sense with reference to "disorganization"; the continuing tension between the two means that what constitutes "the" organization is under constant review.
Confronting Dualism	The tension of différance requires us: to recognize the inevitable interdependence between apparently polar opposites; to challenge boundaries between supposedly discrete categories; and to acknowledge the importance of ongoing tensions and paradoxes.
Power/Knowledge	Power is not a finite resource but a web of relationships in which all individuals are enmeshed. While some are advantaged within this web, no one is "in control" of it. What passes for knowledge (and truth) is not neutral but emerges from these relationships.
Privileged	Nothing can be "naturally" privileged; all privilege is the product of power/knowledge effects.
Reflexivity	The importance of reflecting on the assumptions that we make in producing what we regard as knowledge.

TABLE 2

Two Interpretations of the Postmodern Organization *

Dream	Nightmare
• Individuals are valued as ends, for their unique contributions; playfulness and quality of life are central. • Hierarchical controls are eschewed as inconsistent with shared power; emphasis is on egalitarian relationships. • Change is expected and celebrated. It is a source of renewal and creativity for organizational members. • Diversity is valued, everyone has a voice and all the voices are heard. Difference is sought after as a valued attribute. Diversity of all types — gender, age, ethnicity, and culture — abounds. Difference of opinion is expected, emotions are encouraged. • Leadership is diffuse and distributed among all those who seek it. Collaboration and consensus are put into practice and trust and confidence soar. All members help to construct and implement a vision into which diverse realities from inside and outside the organization are integrated. • Needs govern the choice of technology instead of efficiency. Technological determinism is challenged, as is the idea that people serve technology. • Members have holistic and global views of the organization, the business, social, and physical environment. They are comfortable with the idea that the organization has multiple identities and, yet, represents a holistic entity of which they are an architect/designer • Individuals experience a sense of fulfillment: their work provides different challenges and allows them sufficient autonomy to reconcile them; personal life is enhanced by and enhances work life.	• Individuals are valued as means to serve organizational goals; team processes and group tyranny dominate. • Unobtrusive controls substitute for bureaucratic controls. Meanings negotiated within teams enforce conformity. • Constant change robs individuals of feelings of security and stability, producing alienation and frustration • A cacophony of voices erupts as political correctness stymies open discussion and supplants purposeful work. Contention is pervasive and members are on the defensive. Noise dominates and individuals are frustrated at not being heard. • Leadership is absent or manipulative. Either no one is in charge, everyone feels abandoned, and there are no answers without experts or leaders practice manipulative and subtle forms of seduction. Form dominates substance and deviant views are censored or coopted. • "New" technologies are used to control. E-mail becomes a means of surveillance and home commuting a source of isolation and powerlessness. • Local meanings and multiple identities confuse members. The picture is so fragmented that they are unable to make sense of it. Incompatible messages confuse and different identities from different parts of the organization cannot communicate. • Individuals are torn apart: their work life makes incompatible demands of them which they find difficult to reconcile and their personal life intrudes uncomfortably into their work.

* Adapted from Gillespie, & Meyer (1995: 33-4).

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Author/s:

Hardy, C;Palmer, I

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