

The 'other side' of management discourse

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Introduction

I have previously written on ways in which managerial strategies and discourses were deployed in local authorities as part of their organisational restructuring programmes (Maile 1995). Local Authority professionals would draw upon their own members' resources (Fairclough 1989, 1993) to interpret and deploy managerial discourses in a way that was in-keeping with their previously held, but ambiguous, values of public service. This sometimes had the unintentional consequence of contributing to privatisation of former welfare and municipal services. Ultimately, the strategic deployment and collocations of politically and socially ambiguous vocabularies, in addition to organisational rationalisations, facilitated a process by which professional identifications with an earlier post-war settlement that informed the work of local authorities, became subsumed by the managerial discourses of a neo-liberal agenda.

Management discourses are not only a powerful organisational force, but are a cultural force too, as some now classic studies on the subject have shown (Bendix 1963; Child 1969; Nichols 1974; Merkle 1980). Such insights are useful for thinking about attempts on the part of a range of governments and their nation states, to manage the social and political fall-out of neo-liberalism and to rely upon markets and members of civil society, rather than government principally, to deal with them.

In this context, managerial discourses have been extended to civil society (Maile and Braddon 2003) and are part of the neo-liberal governance strategies of what Jessop (1993, 2001) has described as the Schumpetarian Workfare State. The government is pursuing a range of policies to fulfil a hollowed out state, including services which were once publically funded but which now involve public-private initiatives, corporate philanthropy and volunteering. This is something which is typical of a range of countries from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and of course the United States. Honours are being used to interpolate citizens as volunteers and workers into these new positions by setting up role models. There are clear resonances here between the hierarchies of honours and the hierarchies of workplaces and cultural processes which invest authority and status in some groups and not others (Bordieau 1992, 2000; Weber 1922; Tonneis 1995)

Prime Minister Gordon Brown's priority to upskill Britain's workforce, according to the principles of a workfare state, has resulted in a related emphasis on shaping the curriculum's and pedagogic practices of schools, colleges and – more recently Higher Education. As such knighthoods and dame-hoods, for example, have been given to head-teachers who 'turned around' failing state schools. These awards within the state sector are also an attempt to raise the status of the teaching profession which is facing a recruitment crisis.

The voluntary sector and low paid public service workers are also highlighted as this fits in with broader government policies on public and welfare delivery, already discussed. As the *Times* (July 25th 2007) announced 'Local, everyday heroes' will dominate the honours list'; everyday heroes largely comprising those who contribute to their local communities. In these cases, it could also be argued that the Government is attempting to substitute honours and titles for increased pay and better working conditions.

Some of the middling and higher honours are being awarded to those in strategic positions at senior professional and managerial levels, who are involved in delivering the flagship policies of New Labour. What Cannadine (1992) has referred to as a 'hierarchy in the state' continues in the convoluted hierarchies, titles and orders to resonate with the statuses of general society. This hierarchy in the state also, often subliminally, informs and encourages the forging of other hierarchies and values – including those of workplaces and schools.

One question I am keen to explore, relates to the processes by which personal beliefs become invested in prevailing managerial and official honours discourses? Some attempt to answer the question requires awareness of the ways in which management thought as a cultural force in Britain is located in the more traditional institutional environment which frames and promotes it; the British Honours System in particular.

In contemporary society, the Government's use of the Honours System might be thought of as a kind of senior management strategy to create role models and to reward efforts with accolades rather than increased pay at the lowest level of the honours hierarchy; a means of dealing with some of the (perceived and/or real) global pressures encountered by the nation state. Here the Honours System continues to fulfil a historical function in rewarding those who implement and enact politically strategic functions of the nation state, albeit one which is now conceived as seriously undermined by a neo-liberal global order.

Many members of the public living in Britain and abroad have expressed disdain for the prevalence of business and banking services in high honours awards and the too close association of honours with government agendas. The Public Administration Select Committee Inquiry of 2004 also identified many of the outmoded colonial and class-ridden aspects of the system. The

expansion of honours has to be placed within the context of prevailing hierarchies which seem to be largely institutionally constrained.

Even so, only about three percent of those awarded an honour refuse them. Reasons for accepting are complex and are partly to do with Britain's unique political system and history.

However, some acknowledgement of the role of the unconscious imagination is central to a non-reductive approach to exploring the relationship between social/organisational structure and individual identity and agency. The question of identification is important here.

Identification with social roles and the people or objects they come to symbolise, is something that involves emotional investment in self and society (Craib 2001: 69-69; Flugel 1955). Honours are one means by which to generate role models and identifications with particular types of activity pursued and encouraged by governments. But the ego itself is comprised of *multiple* identifications (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 205, 2007: 7; Elliot 1992: 111) "... internally shaped by the unconscious imagination of the individuals they affect..." (Elliot 1992: 112).

This too can apply to management thought or strategies as material from in-depth interviews suggests. The more unconscious dynamics of the social psyche are live in the imaginative free associative material generated by honours. Alternative values and feelings which have shaped personal integrity or character may emerge in the course of psycho-social interviewing (Hollway and Jefferson 2001), along with the more destructive, internalised aspects of dominant hierarchies and inequalities endorsed by the British Honours System. A combination of narrative interviewing, the maintenance of field notes and the use of psycho-analytic techniques which includes free association and attention to transferences and counter-transferences is a useful means of drawing attention to the repressed dimensions of dominant

discourses. I have discovered from interviewing over fifty people from diverse backgrounds that psycho-social inquiry uncovers different values and emotional investments as these have been generated by formative personal and social relationships.

One knighted interviewee who had suffered racism himself and witnessed the hardship and struggles of his parents suffering as economic migrants of the early 1960s, had invested energy into the idea of the 'self-made man' (an emotional defence) typical of prevailing neo-liberal discourses which place a stress on highly individualistic achievement (Sennett 1993, 1998) as well as the more traditional myths and fantasies of honours – knights of Arthurian legend as dimensions of the myth-making of the British nation state (Anderson 1983; Potter and Wetherall 1987). Another talked of his shame in not having 'achieved'; of being dishonoured and disrespected by "a system he couldn't play"; the rhetoric of the 'everyday hero' was in his words 'small beer for a life of humiliation'.

A managerialist or business discourse informed another interviewee's surface recounting of the background to his receiving a CBE, but attention to the other side of his story suggested a strong identification with collectivist values and a frustration with the limited terms and social practices (including the greater voice of those with honours awards) which would authorise him to voice his professional commitments and concerns about corporate abuse of information technology.

Ironically, because of the close associations of honours with the government's flagship policies, including the pursuit of public and private initiatives and city academies; anxieties of corruption and nepotism of the honours system sometimes get carried over or transferred into other organisations and senior roles within them.

Interweaving responses to discussions about official honours are the more traditional associations of the British Honours System with elite groupings.

Mental representations of social class remain central to the British Honours System. Class can be represented and read as any number of cultural ('classy') artefacts (etiquette, style of dress, speech, deportment, etc.) the personal effects of lifestyle choice or whimsy. These too are conveyed through a very traditional institution, something which can trigger residual social anxieties.

Honours awards evoke memories, attachments and identifications with those family and friends –who are written out of society's reward structures; the dis-honoured, those who might have got caught up in the criminal justice system; those who can't hold down a job; those who fail. And yet, to come from those communities in which such things are experienced and to succeed is, in effect, to deny those communities and relationships.

While Terry may feel, on one level that his CBE is for services approved of at the time by Jack Straw and other members of the government; on another it is experienced as an outward sign of coming through the battles of a fractured community as well as identification with those who have had to make considerable efforts to strive and struggle against the odds, especially a father who achieved his qualifications at night school who Terry remembered as 'never resting, always working well into the late night'. Holding an award in an honours hierarchy, takes Terry in some ways away from *and* back to those early roots. He described receiving his honour as a 'shock and uplifting', this conveying a sense of the conflicting feelings of dislocation from the world and culture of a working class childhood

And this is my main point, management discourses and strategies which increasingly include the Government's use of official honours may be implemented to persuade and constitute work and 'community' identities of various sort, but this is never a totalising process, and often raises contradictory ideas and feelings.

Honours hierarchies echo the strategic priorities of government, currently to restructure and re-orient former public services; they also, in some ways paradoxically, resonate with more traditional social exclusions, stigmas and reduced opportunities for respect and recognition on the part of social groups symbolically placed at the lower ends of the honours hierarchy; groups that are denied in the individual quest for success. Striving for recognition tends to accompany fear of anonymity, social exclusion and at worst social stigma. None of these tendencies are particularly healthy for constructive or productive work – which, as an unintended consequence, undermines the neo-liberal drive for economic efficiency that is a key reason for promoting the Honours System in the first place.

Terry, for example, conveyed something of his struggle to carve out a position of respectability as an escape from poverty and stigma, in a world of attachments and liking for those who get caught up in 'wrong' side of the criminal justice system. His outward recognition in the form of a senior honour, for rationalising an organisation within probation services; was a high price to pay for submerged feelings of dis-identification and detachment from social groups which was necessary to his career success. His strategy to succeed entailed a cost to him, some of his family relationships and friends; the taking up of a different position – one which sometimes involved physical as well as intellectual and emotional battles

In this, honours awards for recognition of personal success are not necessarily effective in delivering what they seek to deliver. The rhetoric of the new governance and the communitarian agenda on which it relies are rooted in a culture which endorses a highly individualistic orientation to work and achievement. 'Everyday heroes' are ironically those who are being recognised for their contributions to communities; while those in receipt of higher honours have often had to demonstrate a highly focused, individualistic orientation to work and encourage the same in others. An honour, even a higher award, cannot override sacrifices of formative social relationships and identifications.

Conclusion

Engagement with the 'other side' of management discourses and strategies, including the harnessing of honours to neoliberal agendas in general, and managerial governance agendas in particular, extends beyond the issues discussed above. I suspect it can motivate, inform and frame, a potentially fruitful and broader debate about the kinds of values, social dependencies and contributions that we, as a society, might wish to encourage and recognise

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