Chapter summary

Critical management scholars seek to identify and expose aspects of human ways of being that are destructive or exploitative with an intention to help change such situations. Because many critical theorists believe that we are all implicated in creating, using and embedding ideas that enable such destruction and exploitation, we invite you to examine critically the key ideas with which we create the stories we tell ourselves about who we are and the ethical reasoning by which we justify the shaping of our existence. We refer to these key ideas as social constructs, social fabrications, or fictive entities. You might think of them as key characters in our version of a Genesis story – the story through which we tell ourselves who we are and why we are here. The study of what is believed to exist is called ‘ontology’. We are interested in the abstract ideas or concepts of western neoliberalism. Among such key ideas are ‘democracy’ and ‘the market’. These ideas about the relationships and sanctioned actions between people come to be experienced as seemingly real things, as entities that we can observe, feel, and engage with. These seemingly ‘real things’ are in our view better thought of as the social fabrications or organising principles that we use to craft or accept our identities as individuals, and as groups; communities, churches, companies, economies and nations. Enacted together, these are experienced as ‘our society’ and increasingly ‘the global market’. The study of how we justify our faith in the existence of a given social order is called ‘epistemology’. In Understanding Management Critically we are interested in exploring how we each contribute to ‘making real’ the social fabrications through which we appear to organise ourselves, allow ourselves to be organised, to control others. Do not be afraid of these difficult words. We will practise our understanding of them in various parts of this book. Practise using them whenever you can. Familiarity with them will help you develop yourself as a critically aware human being. Preparing ourselves to examine some of the basic ideas with which we generate the social world that we so easily take for granted is the purpose of this chapter. Such an examination is a good way to expand our thoughts. It is what critical theorists and activists call ‘consciousness-raising’. In this book we examine who we think we are, what we think we are entitled to, and at whose expense.

Webpage structure

On this webpage you will find:

1.1 Revision notes for Chapter 1: Fabricating our Humanity.
1.2 Exercising your understanding.
1.3 People to meet, [web]places to go, actions to take.
1.4 Could you, would you, should you?
1.5 Reflection.
1.1 Revision notes for Chapter 1: Fabricating our humanity

Creating knowledge, truth and legitimacy: The entities with which we populate our myths, our logic and our ethics
People ‘make’ meaning and through this creative action, set in place the ideas that justify subsequent action. Consider the poem below:

‘Protesters’ and ‘Hooligans’, ‘Rascals’ and ‘Remedies’
London is burning.
Young hooligans and murderers are to blame.
“…feral rats!”
Catch and trap them!
Lock them up!
Or kill them.

In the managing of our activities, managing meaning is an important part of our creative responsibilities. ‘Naming’ the world that we think we see, or the world we want to see, is one of the most powerful activities we as people engage with. Some might say it is the divine in the human. Naming involves deciding who is to be seen as ‘friend’ or ‘foe’ and how each is to be engaged with. In the poem above you will see many overt and implied threats. In Chapter 5 and 6 we will explore the changes in language of employment that carry a wealth of re-negotiations, impositions and compliance – e.g. from labour to employees, from employee to welfare bludger, and in a recent example in the US Army, from a (tacit) definition of homosexual people as unacceptable for employment to their full recognition as valuable employees. These too carry implied and even overt promises and threats. Such a play with words can help us think more critically about the relationships between people and their implications. Wall Street was the Place where our wealth was managed. Directly and indirectly, we allowed its brokers to invest on our behalf. Once such meaning and responsibilities have been established, we can all ‘get on with the job’. In this case, of devising whole systems for financial organisation (legitimising hedge funds and futures trading for example) and training people to enforce the prevailing meaning. As some of the activities of Wall Street’s heroes began to cause significant grief, ordinary people became more consciously aware of the impact of these experts we had entrusted with our savings. This period of history might make it reasonable to think about Wall Street as a pirate ship or stealth bomber for example, to describe the activities that have seen many people lose their wealth and sometimes their very means to life. Those who have been fleeced of their hard earned savings or who have seen their pension plans become valueless would no doubt agree.

- What might be needed to re-orientate Wall Street to regain the respect of the population?
- Do the attitudes of bankers and brokers matter?
- If they do, how would we invite a transformation of attitudes?

1 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-14456964

2 http://gvnet.com/streetchildren/Brazil.htm
Critical theorists are interested in the ways specific values become embodied in different relationships, objects and belief systems. When ideas and relationships between them become routinised and taken for granted, they become experienced as ‘a system’. This ‘system’ seems so material and the associated codes and practices seem like such ‘common sense’ that the notion that these systems are just groups of value-laden ideas becomes lost to our conscious thought. Often times these ‘systems’ are discussed as though they are ‘real beings’ with an existence so independent of human thought that they have the power to act and control, to reward and punish, to require sacrifice and fealty. A common example is ‘the economy’.

‘The economy’ must be served at all costs – much as must ‘The Nation’ in times of war. Both social fabrications can command personal sacrifice – even from those unlikely to benefit. ‘The economy’, in our view, is the manifestation of certain ideas and values in the routines of people through their relationships with each other. ‘The economy’, now grammatically presented as ‘a thing’ might be more usefully thought of as a constellation of ideas, values, rules and customs that have been codified in a raft of policies and a myriad of practices. The origin of ‘the economy’ in the human mind as a fictive entity is long forgotten. Its Genesis is a story that is largely unknown or ignored. Experienced as ‘an entity’ it can be discussed as having ‘needs’ or as ‘requiring sacrifice’ for its growth or sustainability. Yet if we think critically we can see that ‘the economy’ is not ‘a thing’ in the same way that a cat, a chair, a car, or a building may be thought of as a thing. ‘The Economy’ and its kin – ‘The Market’, ‘The Corporation’ and many more such fabrications – belong to a cast of characters that together make up the family of fabrications that have collectively become known as capitalism – the all-encompassing idea from which and through which these ideas are given meaning in a particular time and place.

The perceived thing-like entities and their kin with which our stories about ourselves are populated might be more accurately thought of as a set of value-laden ideas for organising the specific activities of trade and exchange, and commerce and governance. In contemporary forms of corporate capitalism these ‘thing-like’ ideas are lubricated by a raft of wider social values that, according to critical management scholars, do not serve all equally well and may be putting the vibrancy of Earth at risk. In Chapter 1 of Understanding Management Critically, we introduce some key ideas from well-known critical theorists. Their ideas help us to deconstruct taken for granted assumptions with which we have constructed or generated stories about ourselves and our relationships with each other and with Earth. The understanding of their origins in the human imagination, and the implications of their naturalisation in our everyday logic, provides us the opportunity to imagine alternative ideas, rules and practices. Such an understanding invites us to examine whose values and interests are embedded, normalised and valorised in a given time and place. This chapter is designed to make explicit the links between critical theory, the study of organisation, and the ways management ideas intersect and flow from these ideas to create systems that serve or put at risk the well-being of people and planet.

Perhaps we can think about the achievement of universal and planetary well-being as a commitment to goodness – a commitment worthy of our devotion. But what is goodness? Hitler and many other despots have been able to persuade a population of the goodness of their intentions, the legitimacy of their aspirations, and the acceptance of significant harm ‘for the common good’. A lot of personal and collective soul-searching has occurred in European populations since the atrocities of the Nazi regime came under examination. This is important soul searching – but it is done in hindsight. Can we, human beings, develop our critical consciousness and conscience in order to invigorate actions that reduce and ultimately prevent harm in the present? Where does the responsibility for a greater self-critique lie?
The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is ‘knowing thyself’ as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. The first thing to do is to make such an inventory.³

1.2 Exercising your understanding

ALERT! Protecting [national] interests

“Our lifestyle is not up for negotiation”
George Bush⁴

“We will again be number one”
Barack Obama⁵

We provide you below with two examples of an ‘Alert’. We draw your attention to the close connections of corporate activities and the determination of the USA to protect its interest in the world. We provide two examples that you may want to think about, discuss or journal:

1.2.1 Working and dying for the company
1.2.2 The use of Drones to do the dirty work

But who is ‘The Nation’ or ‘The Corporation’? How far may nations or companies go to protect selective interests?⁶ Are Drones accountable for their impact?

1.2.1 Working and dying for the company

The employees at Foxconn are working to produce gadgets which consumers purchase to enhance their life styles. In 2010, 14 Foxconn employees committed suicide.⁷ In August 2012, South African Police shot dead more than 30 miners and injured many more at the Lonmin Platinum mine.⁸ In an ironic twist of logic, the surviving miners were charged with murder. Nokia, a signatory to the GC⁹ and other mobile device manufacturers, were exposed in the media to be benefitting from the exploitation of young boys.¹⁰ These are just three examples

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⁴ Cited in Danaher, K. (1994) 50 Years is enough: The case against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Cambridge, MA: South End Press. (p. 107)


⁶ http://www.alternet.org/economy/5-industries-are-mercilessly-robbing-american-people

⁷ https://www.google.co.nz/#q=foxconn+employee+suicide


¹⁰ http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/blog/congo-child-labour-mobile-minerals
of the conditions under which our consumer items are produced. It is said to be in the interests of investors and consumers to keep costs of production down. How far will nations, corporations and individuals [be allowed to] go to justify such human abuse in order to stay on top of the game? What conditions of service or servitude will we tolerate to protect our consumer spending capacity? Ask this of yourself:

- How far will I go to protect my lifestyle?
- How far is too far?
- Who or what should come into my considerations?
- How do I ‘justify’ the ‘entities’ in our assessments – e.g. ‘profit’, ‘products’ ‘consumer choice’, ‘consumer rights’?
- How is Obama’s call to reinstate the USA as ‘Number One’ a risky call for many on domestic soil and also for the rest of the human population?

1.2.2 Drones: Power and control from a (safe) distance

Think about the military image of drones that can be sent out to defend/destroy from a distance. How does the metaphor of ‘drones’ help us to think about ‘power from a distance’ when thinking about the governors and executives of the various corporations who are mandated to make profit that fuel our jobs, stock our pantries, and fund our pensions. The pirates of Wall Street were given much licence. But it seemed that we were all on auto-pilot. We allowed ‘the system’ to run itself – so long as we did not feel its violence directly.

1.2.3 Six little exercises to further stretch your consciousness

i) The creative (divine) in the human: f ontology and epistemology
This chapter has invited you to get your mind around the difficult works of Ontology and Epistemology. Plainly speaking, these words refer to the study of what we believe exists, and how do we know. In the area of social and political thought, the words we use carry meanings that go well beyond a simple definition in the way that the use of the word ‘boy’ may stand for ‘young male’ – as a biological fact. To call a Black man ‘boy’, as was typical in the era of slavery, changes the meaning of the world Boy. Practise your understanding of the words ‘ontology’ and ‘epistemology’ on the naming of the youth involved in the London riots of 2011 and the homeless boys of Rio as ‘vermin’. In Papua New Guinea such alienated boys and young men are known as ‘rascals’. Many are imprisoned as well as killed as the violence of survival for them takes its toll. What are the implications of such naming for the youth, for the families and communities, for the policing and justice systems and for wider society? Do corporations who invest or shun investment in these regions have any responsibility for these outcomes?

ii) Mainstreaming radicals
What is the difference between the protestors who were the vanguard of social change in the past, whose ideas have now become mainstream, and from whose courage we now all benefit? How have their risks and sacrifices been morphed into everyday organisational practice? (Think, for example about the early suffragettes and the impact they have had on what we now know as ‘equal employment opportunities’; the people once demonised as ‘eco-terrorists’ or diminished as ‘greenies’ and ‘tree-huggers’ and their influence in sustainability debates; the unveiling of a statue in honour of Martin Luther King (Jnr) – a man of a lineage of people once defined as ‘beasts of burden’ whose legacy has energised contemporary compensation claims and class action suits by the subsequent generations still affected.)
Are/were the campers in Wall Street or any of the other cities in the world sending a message of equal social significance? Will it be heard or suppressed? By what means?

Flipping through an old Chiquita guest book, [Dan] Koeppel saw the scrawled names of United States senators, scientists, CIA agents and Honduran presidents. “Everybody was in there,” he says. Browsing through the research facility’s library, the journalist paged through a chipper recipe book featuring the Chiquita banana girl, who was shown topless, as she always was, giving instructions on how to prepare such delicacies as “banana coconut rolls.”

“I found these strange Chiquita cookbooks a hundred yards away from where massacres were planned,” he says. Bananas appear so innocent. So is cocoa, coffee, and the myriad of natural phenomena from the minerals we mine to the people we harness to serve self-interest. But we can only harness these if we have identified them as ‘resources’ for our ‘legitimate exploitation’. How many seemingly ‘innocent’ products have been harnessed to serve vested interests that go well beyond the mere prioritising of profits? Make a list – starting with, for example: ‘River’: ‘source of life’ or ‘sluice-drain’?

For centuries, American democracy has been built by ordinary people standing up in the town square and using the tools available to them – from the printing press to blogs – to build organisations and social movements for change. The work of citizens engaging with each other to organise, debate, struggle and decide created a politics of common purpose and democratic accountability – a sharp contrast with the market-based approaches that have come to dominate public policy today. As American politics becomes increasingly corrupted by those who command the most money, the only hope for shared prosperity and real democracy lies in mobilising millions of Americans from all walks of life to be participants in shaping our collective futures on the issues most important to them. Was there ever a time when all people in the USA, or any democratic nation, were able to access a dignified life? What do we risk when we ‘romanticise’ the past? What early corruptions of justice lined the coffers of the European Elite that survived or benefited from the Feudal era? What is the basis for land occupation and ownership in the land mass now known as Alaska, Canada and the USA?

Avaaz.org is a 10-million-person global campaign network that works to ensure that the views and values of the world's people shape global decision-making. (‘Avaaz’ means ‘voice’ or ‘song’ in many languages.) Avaaz members live in every nation of the world; our team is spread across 13 countries on 4 continents and operates in 14 languages. Learn about some of Avaaz's biggest campaigns or follow them on Facebook or Twitter. Here is an example of their work to influence change. What do you make of it?

Bankers sing to engender trust in the banking industry. Yeah right! Profits soar while employee commitments are stretched.

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11 http://www.salon.com/2008/04/19/bananas
12 http://hausercenter.harvard.edu/1951/april-10-the-gettysburg-project-understanding-and-revitalizing-civic-engagement/
1.2.4 Summary: Putting some big ideas into place

In order to tackle and unpack many of the ideas we take for granted it is useful to think about what kind of entities we populate our logic, our reasoning and our consciousness. On closer inspection, what seems real and even natural may turn out to be a particular figment of the human imagination. Great examples are the way we speak about ‘the economy’ or ‘the market’ or ‘the company’ as if these are real things. We certainly experience them as real. However, these words refer to the concepts and rituals of trade and exchange. They are the manifestation of principles of organisation into practice. We naturalise these principles in our everyday language and we give them human-like characteristics and god-like powers: the corporation is not lean enough, the market is weak, the economy requires sacrifice. Observing the way we treat these ideas as objects with affective powers is a great starting place for students who wish to study management critically and reflectively.

Ontology and epistemology are difficult words to get our minds around. They are concepts that help us understand how and why certain ideas have gained traction at a certain time or place or why other ideas are difficult to implement. Below are some stories and some incidents to help you understand these words. They invite you to interweave attention to indigenous knowledge, spirituality, gender, poverty, environmental concerns, and ethics as markers of ontological diversity – even within seemingly homogenous populations. Use the questions below to also enhance your understanding of these big words when considering the ideas of ‘commodification’ and ‘marketisation’ and subjugation (to surveillance and control) that will feature in a number of chapters to come.

i) Creating commodities and markets

Jason and Mary had been struggling to meet their rent for some months. At the request of a friend, they hosted a travelling Swami overnight. The evening included an outreach event organised by the Swami’s sponsors. James was moved by the Swami’s observations of western society as overly materialistic. He believed a more spiritual approach to life is more valuable. The Swami offered James a personal Mantra. It cost $165 dollars. Jason was pleased. Mary was furious. What was the ‘commodity’ the Swami had to ‘sell’?

Exercise: ‘Mantras’, ‘Futures’, ‘Hedgefunds’ are examples of ideas that have been ‘commodified’. Make a list of other ‘commodities’ you know of that have their origin in an ‘idea’.

ii) Investing value

Margie was required to complete an accounting course as part of a management degree. She was not numerically inclined and was not looking forward to this course. Imagine her surprise when, on the first day, the lecturer explained that for some people, particularly many indigenous peoples, trees are believed to be actual ancestors with intent and purpose to be respected. For them, trees have a life force. The felling of ancient trees complicates the view of logging as an economic development strategy, particularly in regions such as the rainforests where indigenous people still thrive or are under threat of removal in the interests of ‘developers’. The question Margie was required to answer was: How does one place ‘value’ on ‘a tree”? Bearing the above in mind, what would your response be? How can we understand the concepts of ontology and epistemology better from this example? What kind

of ‘entity’ is ‘a tree’ in a capitalist worldview? What kind of ‘entities’ are trees in non-capitalist orientations that you know about?

iii) Ethics
Medical tourism has opened the way for many people to have the treatment and recovery opportunities that may not be accessible in their domestic health systems. It has also spawned a market in body parts. What are the moral nuances in selling one’s own blood to laboratories; donating or selling one’s own kidney to researchers; allowing older or terminally ill people to die; to kidnap and kill vulnerable people; or to execute prisoners so as to harvest useable body parts? Are there any ethical constraints to what might be bought and sold on a market?

iv) Keeping personal information (private)
Access to personal information may be useful for marketers and politicians alike. The risk intervention in one’s legitimate business is growing. 15 Does this matter?

v) The police are here to keep us safe, are they not? See for example the experience of organic farmers in Texas. 16 What defence would you have if you were treated in this way?

1.3 People to meet, [web]places to go, actions to take

In this section we provide you with some key people to learn about, interesting webpages to visit, and actions you might take in relation to the topics discussed in Chapter 1 of Understanding Management Critically. Add to this list the people, places and actions you find inspirational to ensure your consciousness of and for the world is continuously expanding! Write something about each person, place or action that is of interest or concern to you.

People to meet

- **Eve Annecke**: founding director of the Sustainability Institute, an international living and learning centre for studies and experience in ecology, community and spirit. www.sustainabilityinstitute.net
- **Richard Branson**: English business magnate and investor, founder of Virgin Group, which comprises more than 400 companies. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgin_Group
- **Michael Moore**: Filmmaker and activist. http://www.michaelmoore.com/
- **Vandana Shiva**: Indian environmental activist and anti-globalisation author. https://www.google.co.nz/#q=vandana+shiva
- **Edward Snowden**: American computer specialist, a former CIA employee, and former NSA contractor who disclosed classified NSA documents to several media outlets, initiating the NSA leaks which reveal operational details of a global surveillance apparatus run by the NSA, its Five Eyes partners, and numerous commercial and international partners. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Snowden

15 http://news.antiwar.com/2012/07/14/nsa-whistleblower-spy-agency-gathering-info-on-virtually-every-us-citizen/

• **Winona La Duke**: American Indian activist, environmentalist, economist and writer of Anishinaabe descent.  
  http://voices.cla.umn.edu/artistpages/laduke_winona.php

**[Web]places to go**

- [http://www.corpwatch.org/](http://www.corpwatch.org/)  
  CorpWatch: Holding Corporations accountable
- [https://www.google.co.nz/#q=Global+Reporting+Initiative](https://www.google.co.nz/#q=Global+Reporting+Initiative)  
  Global Reporting Initiative: Encouraging sustainability reporting
  Business and Human Rights Resource Centre
- [http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2013/mar/30/democracy-project-david-graeber-review?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487](http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2013/mar/30/democracy-project-david-graeber-review?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487)  
  David Graeber: The Democracy Project
- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeHzc1h8k7o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeHzc1h8k7o)  
  John Pilger: War on Democracy
- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OazUh0Ym8rc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OazUh0Ym8rc)  
  The ‘Yes men’ [are fixing the world!]
  United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
  Oxfam says we can end poverty
  Stories (not atoms) are our essence
- [http://globalgrandmotherpower.com/events.html](http://globalgrandmotherpower.com/events.html)  
  Global Grandmothers
- [http://www.oxfam.org/](http://www.oxfam.org/)  
  Oxfam

**Actions to take**

Consciousness raising and reflective thinking: *‘be the change you want to see in the world’*. This is a call to transformation of selves as a necessary aspect of changing systems, corporations and nations.

- **Support the raising of consciousness in your community.** See for example the creativity of ‘Thank you, Ed Snowden’  
- **Find out how have the Occupiers progressed their cause.**  
  http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2012/apr/24/occupy-wall-street-what-is-to-be-done-next
- **Read the history of various forms of dissent and the processes of restoring order.** Whose order is enforced? Note any police or military activity. What more subtle forms for compliance are involved? What kinds of resistance or rebellion have had lasting impact? What have been the benefits to you?
- **Help fund revolting actions:** e.g. [http://theyesmen.org/](http://theyesmen.org/)
• Make contributions/efforts to change the world to become a fairer place, e.g. http://www.kiva.org/
• Indemedia: Add to your ‘favorite bar’ and open often.
• http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_Media_Center
• Avaaz: Add to your ‘favorite bar’ and open often. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avaaz

1.4 Could you? Would you? Should you?

Could you, would you, should you add your voice to calls made to radically overhaul prevailing ideas about ‘economic development’ – locally/globally?

1.5 Reflection

Who/what is ‘a critic’?

Bruno Latour suggests that a critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles [...], not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naive believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather [...], not the one who alternates haphazardly between anti-fetishism and positivism, but the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution [...]. I have said enough to indicate the direction of critique, not away but toward the gathering, the Thing.17

“Democracy and democratic education are founded on faith in men and women, on the belief that they not only can but should discuss the problems of their country, their continent, their world, their work, and the problems of democracy itself.”

Paulo Freire
1921-1997