Chapter summary

That people are naturally competitive is often used as a justification for the way we have crafted a system of human organisation that claims to be a ‘meritocracy’. It is a system being intensified globally. Those who decline a polite invitation, recommendation, or command to participate in competitive games that create winners and losers may find themselves under ever stronger pressure to comply. Everyone is expected to join the game – or at least be sitting on the benches as well prepared reserves. As in any competitive game, there are rules, training requirements and fitness assessments. Most importantly, there is a [supposedly level] playing field on which to play the game. The most successful competitors (who play within the rules of the game) are winners. Losses are merely to be thought of as the fair outcome of the game – no matter how well played by the losers.

What are the implications of this way of thinking when we apply it to the way we organise our humanity, the way work will be done and rewarded, and the way we shape the players to suit the game? What are the implications when there is only one game to play – and our lives depend not only on participation but being among the winners? Competition for desirable, scarce, or just any job can create fears in individuals and tensions among people and whole communities. In the larger scheme of things this tension may manifest as racism, gender discrimination, and intergenerational struggles for the means of livelihoods. Protected pension plans and job security are now rare. High youth unemployment will leave a dangerous spectre over the world – a legacy of the economic crisis bestowed on the world at the turn of the twenty-first century. Can love [for our neighbour] trump such fear? Who is our neighbour anyhow, in communities where few people now settle for a life-time and the need for jobs is a significant reason for community and family disruption. Organisational flexibility is seen as a vital ingredient of a nimble free market. It is achieved through the legislative possibility of adding or expelling people and expanding or intensifying the work of employees in order to meet profitability agendas. This chapter invites you to think about the myriad of ways human beings are expected to adjust themselves, to perhaps reshape their very soul, to fit the part they are allocated to play in what Chapter 3 of Understanding Management Critically depicts as the neo-liberal idea(l)s being intensified globally.

Webpage structure

On this webpage you will find:

5.1 Emancipation through employment.
5.2 A list of films: Organise a mini-film festival.
5.3 People to meet, [web]places to go, actions to take.
5.4 Could you, would you, should you?
5.5 Reflection.
5.1 Emancipation through employment

If you truly do your best, then you have good cause to expect the best in return. Time and again you’ll see that when you really do your best, the universe will back you up. Social support will come to you. Resources will arrive. Obstacles will be overcome. Encouraging signs will appear. Life will flow with grace and ease. (Pavlina, 2011: http://www.stevepavlina.com/blog/2011/09/arbeit-macht-frei/)

- How has this path to freedom played out in the lives of the Greek, Italian, Irish and American workers who have been outplaced, downsized, dispossessed of livelihoods, homes and investments?
- How does this notion of ‘the universe will provide’ sit with the outcomes for many university graduates, from Spain to Germany, who cannot find employment in the fields they were advised to study, and have studied with passion, commitment and a good deal of financial investment.
- Does it matter, as a question of justice, if the majority of people thus affected are of a particular gender, racial category or age?
- What are the risks of trusting a doctrine of meritocracy in the context of the current global arrangements of opportunities and costs?
- Marx saw religion as the opiate of the people. Others may think it is sport! How much are these, and/or the ‘new age’ spiritualities implicated in the domestication or emancipation of populations?
- Does the invitation to ‘bring your soul to work’ fill you with optimism?

5.2 A list of films: Organise a mini-film festival

Below are just some ideas. Make your own list. Schedule some set evenings to meet and watch a movie or two with your classmates. Discuss with each other: What has this movie got to do with my (management) education?

- Upton Sinclair’s – The Jungle and a related documentary http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfPQ4qLS6Do
- A Love Story – Mike Moore on Capitalism https://www.google.co.nz/#q=michael+moore+a+love+story+watch+online
- The Corporation http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y888wVY5hzw
- Rabbit Proof Fence http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lbnk8wSVMaM

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

People to meet
- **William Wilberforce**: Abolishing slavery.  
  https://www.google.co.nz/#q=william+wilberforce

- **Caroline Cox**: Contemporary people trafficking and ‘bondage in servitude’.  

- **Noam Chomsky**: Manufacturing consent.  
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQhEBCWMe44

- **Allen Moore**: author of *No Straight Lines*.  
  http://www.no-straight-lines.com/

[Web]places to go

  A “unique tripartite structure of the ILO gives an equal voice to workers, employers and governments to ensure that the views of the social partners are closely reflected in labour standards and in shaping policies and programmes”.

- **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYGx_k_JvIM**  
  We are not for sale!

- **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJDE7xD32oQ**  
  Who are the mob?

  Child labour in tobacco fields

**Actions to take**

- Take actions to erase modern day slavery  
  http://www.notforsalecampaign.org/action/

- Read novels about the lives that are different to yours.  
  What were the authors trying to convey?  
  Uncle Tom’s Cabin  
  The Great Gatsby  
  The Grapes of Wrath  
  The Jungle  
  Bonfires of the Vanities  
  The Kite Flyer

**5.4 Could you, would you should you?**

Could you, would you, should you employ a person to work for you if you cannot pay a living wage?

**5.5 Reflection**
Individually born sufferings are all strikingly similar: whether induced by a growing pile of utility bills and college fee invoices, the miserliness of wages topped up by the fragility of available jobs and inaccessibility of solid and reliable ones, the fogginess of long term life prospects, the restless spectre of redundancy and/or demotion – they all boil down to existential uncertainty: that awesome blend of ignorance and impotence, and an exhaustible source of humiliation.

(Bauman and Donskis, 2013: 64)\(^1\)

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